



## **RIPPER?** **REVEALED**

IS THIS THE FACE OF THE WORLD'S  
MOST INFAMOUS SERIAL KILLER?

**CARNAC CATASTROPHE** MAYOR'S MEGALITHIC MESS  
**WHALES BEHAVING BADLY** ORCA REVENGE ATTACKS  
**HIGHWAY TO HELL** POLAND'S SATANIC BUS ROUTE

**THE  
WORLD'S  
WEIRDEST  
NEWS**

HELL FREEZES OVER • INCORRUPT SAINTS • ROBOT POLITICIANS • THE BELMEZ FACES

THE WORLD OF

STRANGE PHENOMENA

WWW.FORTEANTIMES.COM

# ForteanTimes

FT435 SEPTEMBER 2023 £4.95

## WICCA WOMAN

MARGARET MURRAY,  
THE GRANDMOTHER OF  
MODERN WITCHCRAFT



## WICKER MAN

AN UNPUBLISHED IN-DEPTH  
INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR  
ROBIN HARDY





# FROM THE SAME AUTHOR OF 'OUT OF HAND IN A FOREIGN LAND' WHICH YOU ALSO DIDN'T READ...

"Avoiding carnivores in the Kenyan countryside, getting mugged in Brazil, entering a country at war for a single pint of beer, meeting the gangsters of a Ugandan botanical garden, or simply struggling to urinate in front of Peruvian drug dealers. It all comes with getting off the tourist trail and away from the usual holiday resorts.

Stephen Koral has a dream to travel to a hundred countries before he kicks the bucket. Now in his mid-thirties while juggling adult matters like finances and keeping his fiery wife happy, Koral finds the easy to travel countries are in the rear-view mirror, and the new destinations have become increasingly harder for a British traveller to adapt to in the relentless pursuit of seeing more of the world"

**NEW  
BOOK**  
BY STEPHEN  
KORAL



**"Good  
and that"**



Amazon review

Available at [amazon](https://www.amazon.com) as a paperback or ebook



# CONTENTS



STUDIOCANAL

30 *Burning the Man: Robin Hardy interviewed*



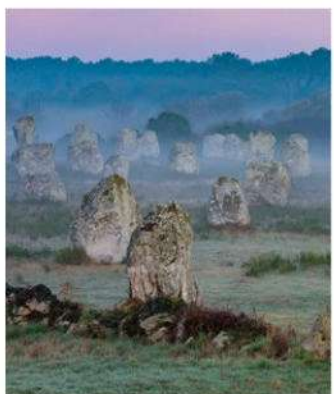
COURTESY MICHAEL O'MARA BOOKS

4 *The Ripper revealed?*



VICTOR WATTS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

26 *Mystic Meg remembered*



ANDIA / UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

6 *Carnac catastrophe*



AMELIA READ PHOTOGRAPHY

61 *Haunted Generation*



JEAN-PIERRE KSIAZEK / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

42 *Saints and other incorruptibles*



## FORTEAN TIMES 435

### Why fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE  
70

## STRANGE DAYS

A digest of the worldwide weird, including: New Ripper theory, meteorite mayhem, phone calls from the dead and much more...

- |    |                  |    |                    |
|----|------------------|----|--------------------|
| 12 | ARCHAEOLOGY      | 22 | THE CONSPIRASPHERE |
| 13 | CLASSICAL CORNER | 25 | MYTHCONCEPTIONS    |
| 14 | GHOSTWATCH       | 26 | NECROLOG           |
| 20 | ALIEN ZOO        | 28 | THE UFO FILES      |

## FEATURES



### 30 COVER STORY THE GRANDMOTHER OF WICCA

From pioneering studies in Egyptology to fighting her corner as a feminist academic, Margaret Murray was a true trailblazer.

Her folklore-driven studies of witchcraft created an image that has stuck to this day – and she even found time to be an occult advisor on 1957's *Night of the Demon*. **BRIAN J ROBB** explores the life and times of the woman behind the still controversial 'witch-cult' theory.

### 38 BURNING THE MAN

This year *The Wicker Man* turns 50. In a previously unpublished interview, **CATHI UNSWORTH** spoke to director Robin Hardy about the film's chequered history and enduring appeal.

### 44 THE INCORRUPTIBLES

As the incorrupt body of a nun sees pilgrims flocking to a Benedictine abbey in Missouri, **TED HARRISON** asks if a life well-lived can help the saintly dodge decay after death and goes in search of the peculiarly well-preserved remains of the great and the good.

## SERIES & REPORTS

### 48 STRANGE STATESMEN

Invasion of the ballot-snatchers **SD TUCKER**

## FORUM

53 Faces in places **CLAIRE DAVY**

54 Weirdness out of Africa **MARK GREENER**

## REGULARS

- |    |           |    |             |    |                |
|----|-----------|----|-------------|----|----------------|
| 02 | EDITORIAL | 65 | LETTERS     | 71 | PHENOMENOMIX   |
| 57 | REVIEWS   | 70 | READER INFO | 72 | STRANGE DEATHS |

## EDITOR

DAVID SUTTON  
drsutton@forteanimes.com

## FOUNDING EDITORS

BOB RICKARD (ft-bobrickard@mail.com)  
PAUL SIEVEKING (sieveking@forteanimes.com)

## NEWS EDITOR

IAN SIMMONS (simmons@forteanimes.com)

## ART DIRECTOR

ETIENNE GILFILLAN (etienne@forteanimes.com)

## BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR

DAVID V BARRETT (dvbarrett@forteanimes.com)

## EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

ABIGAIL MASON

## RESIDENT CARTOONIST

HUNT EMERSON

## PRODUCTION MANAGER

LEE BOYMAN (lee.boyman@metropolis.co.uk)

## ADVERTISING

BEN LORTON (ben.lorton@metropolis.co.uk)

## FT ON THE INTERNET

www.forteanimes.com  
www.facebook.com/forteanimes

FORTEAN TIMES is produced for Diamond Publishing Limited, a member of the Metropolis Group, by WILD TALENTS LTD. Postal address: Fortean Times, PO BOX 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH.

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 issues: UK £50.58; Europe £62; USA £70;  
Rest of the world £70

## CHANGE YOUR ADDRESS, RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION OR REPORT PROBLEMS:

hello@metropolis.co.uk / +44 (0) 208 752 8195

## LICENSING & SYNDICATION

FORTEAN TIMES is available for international licensing and Syndication  
Managing Director  
David Saunders TEL: +44 (0) 208 752 8195  
david.saunders@metropolis.co.uk

## DISTRIBUTION

### DISTRIBUTED IN UK, IRELAND AND WORLDWIDE

by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace,  
London, UK, W2 6JR.

Email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com

## diamondpublishing

PUBLISHED BY DIAMOND PUBLISHING LIMITED.  
A MEMBER OF THE METROPOLIS GROUP.

Fortean Times (ISSN 0308-5899 USPS 023-728) is published 13 times a year with the additional issue (Christmas Special) published in November by Diamond Publishing Limited, 2nd Floor, Saunders House, 52-53 The Mall, Ealing, W5 3AT, United Kingdom. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413-4037, USA. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. US POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Fortean Times, World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413-4037, USA.

© Diamond Publishing Limited: JULY 2023



COVER ILLUSTRATION  
ETIENNE GILFILLAN

MOON AND STONEHENGE:  
ADOBE STOCK IMAGES

PRINTED BY PRECISION  
COLOUR PRINTING

# EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS



## ICUMEN IN?

Welcome to another packed issue, which we hope will lift your sagging spirits as we struggle through another damp, grey British summer. Perhaps we have once again failed to appease the Old Gods and have only ourselves to blame for the unseasonal weather: this month's cover star – pioneering Egyptologist, archaeologist, anthropologist and folklorist Margaret Murray – might have had a few ideas about this; after all, it was her theory of a widespread European witch-cult that helped give birth to modern Wicca and other forms of Pagan religion. Turn to p.30 for Brian J Robb's account of Murray's fascinating life and work. Or if you think an urgent word with Lord Summerisle might do the trick, then head to p.38, where we celebrate the 50th anniversary of folk-horror favourite *The Wicker Man* with a previously unpublished interview – recently rediscovered in the cobwebbed vaults of Fortean Towers – in which Cathi Unsworth sat down with the film's director, the late Robin Hardy, to discuss its ups, downs and unexpected afterlife.

## FORTEAN THOUGHTS AND MEMORIES

Many readers will no doubt be aware that November 2023 will mark a major milestone for *Fortean Times*: it will mark the 50th anniversary of our very first issue. *The News*, as *FT* was known for its first 15 issues, cost 35p and covered such topics as a killer snake on the loose in Windsor Great Park, mind-reading cats and Tunguska (still an *FT* regular after all these years: see p.23). Some of you may still even possess a battered and dog-eared copy, although we suspect that even the most grizzled of *FT* veterans most likely came aboard at a somewhat later date. (Speaking of veterans, a shout-out here to long-time *FT* clipster Alan

Gardiner, whose latest batch of clippings was accompanied by a letter pointing out that "I've been doing this since I was 20, in the shadow of the 1976 drought!" Many thanks, Alan!)

Whether you've been reading or subscribing to *FT* for 50 years or five, we'd like to hear from you.

Firstly, we're running a new reader survey – more on p.64 – which you can access at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ftsvey23> to share your thoughts, likes and gripes about the magazine and help us in planning for the future.

Secondly, in the run-up to our 50th anniversary issue, we'd be keen to hear your personal *FT* memories and stories. How and when did you discover *FT*? What has it meant to you over the years? Has it changed the way you look at the world? What have been your all-time favourite stories? Whatever your thoughts, we'd love to hear them, so please write to us at the usual address or send an email to [drsutton@forteanimes.com](mailto:drsutton@forteanimes.com).

## ERRATUM

**FT430:44:** Michael Holt emailed to point out that in the fake photo of the 'Nazi flying saucer', the swastika is reversed. Michael then followed up with another email, explaining that he had subsequently realised, after consulting Jack Pia's book *Nazi Regalia* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), that the entire image was reversed: "In *Nazi Regalia*, the paintings and drawings reveal that the uniforms are designed so that the left side of the overcoat goes over the right side. In the photo, Hitler's overcoat has the right side over the left. Yes, you are right: I have much spare time. As an explanation: I'm retired."

Too much spare time or not, this strikes us as sterling detective work.



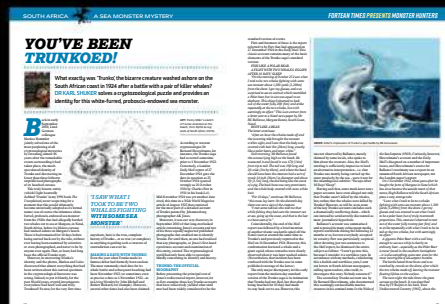


# TIME TO TOP UP THE MONSTER METER?



From the archives of **FORTEAN TIMES**, the world's foremost journal of strange phenomena, comes a new collection exploring the world of cryptozoology – the search for unknown animals.

Join us on expeditions to far-flung Mongolia to find the dreaded **DEATH WORM** of the Gobi Desert, to the Congo in search of a **LIVING DINOSAUR** and to Tajikistan on the trail of **TERRIFYING APE-MEN**. Explore the wilds of the USA on the track of **BIGFOOT** and the South Carolina **LIZARD MAN**, or venture to the marshes of Sweden to investigate sightings of **GIANT SERPENTS**. And sign up for closer-to-home hunts for **NESSIE** and **BRITAIN'S MYSTERY BIG CATS**, including the infamous 'Essex Lion'. **MONSTER HUNTERS** takes readers on an exciting round-the-world quest to track the most amazing, elusive and sometimes unbelievable crypto-creatures. Plus, the collection includes an introduction and updates and commentary on each article by renowned cryptozoologist **DR KARL SHUKER**.



**IN SHOPS NOW OR ORDER ONLINE AT: [SHOP.FORTEANTIMES.COM](http://SHOP.FORTEANTIMES.COM)**





A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

# STRANGE DAYS

## THIS YEAR'S RIPPER

A retired civil servant believes she had finally solved the mystery of Jack's identity

The horrific murders of between three and 11 women (depending on who you ask) that took place primarily between August and November 1888 (or 1891, depending on which you include) that were attributed to an individual who has become known as “Jack the Ripper” after the signatory of a (probably hoaxed) letter to the press, have fascinated everyone from Aleister Crowley to crime novelist Patricia Cornwell in the subsequent 135 years. The murderer (or murderers) was never caught, which has given imaginations free rein to speculate about who was responsible. This has resulted in a colourful cast of suspects being “identified” as the Ripper, which has included a prosperous Liverpool builder, Queen Victoria’s eldest grandson Prince Albert, surgeon William Withy Gull, painter Walter Sickert and even poor old Lewis Carroll.

Now, retired civil servant and former police volunteer Sarah Bax Horton believes that she has finally identified the real Ripper, publishing her findings in *One-Armed Jack: Uncovering the Real Jack the Ripper* (Michael O’Mara Books, 31 Aug). She was particularly drawn to the case by discovering that her great-great-grandfather, Harry Garret, had been a policeman at Leman Street station in Whitechapel in 1888, where the original Ripper investigation was based.

Bax Horton has fingered a local Whitechapel man named Hyam Hyams for the crime, based on medical evidence and reports from witnesses who had seen victims with men immediately before their deaths; several mentioned a man in his mid-30s with a stiff arm, an irregular gait, and bent knees.

Horton has now correlated this with Hyams’s medical records, tracked down in the archives of various infirmaries and asylums, and this has convinced her he was the killer. “For the first time in history, Jack the Ripper can be identified as Hyam Hyams using distinctive physical characteristics,” she says.

In 1888, Hyams was 35 and was of a similar height and build to the man witnesses had described. His medical notes say that he had suffered an injury in February of that year leaving him unable to “bend or extend” his left arm and that he had a bent-kneed, shuffling gait, which Bax Horton suggests was the result of brain damage caused by the severe epilepsy also described in his medical records. He was an alcoholic and known to suffer violent rages, repeatedly assaulting his wife in the belief she was unfaithful, and was eventually arrested for attacking her, and his mother, with what arrest records describe as a “chopper”. Before his arm injury, he was employed as a cigar maker, which, Bax Horton says, meant he would routinely carry a knife and know how to use it.

Hyams had previously been committed to asylums on several occasions, but experienced a significant mental and physical decline after the arm injury which left him unable to work. He was eventually picked up by police as a “wandering lunatic” shortly after the last of the canonical murders in November 1888. He was permanently committed to the Colney Hatch



*Hyams was an alcoholic and known to suffer violent rages*

Lunatic Asylum in north London in September 1889. Medical records describe Hyams as being “particularly violent” after

severe epileptic fits and, as they worsened, Bax Horton believes they could have triggered him to kill. “That escalation path matched the increasing violence of the murders,” Horton says. “He was particularly violent after

his severe epileptic fits, which explains the periodicity of the murders.” She believes that with Hyams having the right physical characteristics to be the man the witnesses saw with victims, experiencing violent mental disturbances, being handy with a knife and living in Whitechapel throughout the period of the murders, the circumstantial evidence puts him well ahead of any other candidate for the

LEFT: Author Sarah Bax Horton.

BELOW: A photograph of Hyam Hyams in the Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum.

Ripper. There is, though, no evidence that he possessed the anatomical knowledge the Ripper is thought to have had, unlike some of the other candidates, such as mortuary attendant Robert Mann, identified as the Ripper in 2009.

Hyams has appeared on lists of Ripper suspects before, but was never taken particularly seriously by Ripperologists. Bax Horton says that one of the reasons for this was misidentification: “When I was trying to identify the correct Hyam Hyams, I found about five. It took quite a lot of work to identify his correct biographical data.” In addition, she says he has “never before been fully explored as a Ripper suspect” because the asylum records were only made public between 2013 and 2015, and before that had been confidential.

The identification of Hyams, unlike several recent “identifications” that have stretched DNA analysis to its limit, benefits from being the fruit of systematic and dogged archive research rather than improbable technical fixes; although 135 years after the event, it is never going to be possible to firmly identify the Ripper, and any attempt to do so remains in the realm of speculation. Hyams is not the first man to be identified as the Ripper based on seemingly convincing evidence, nor will he be the last. *nypost.com*, 15 Jul; *Independent.co.uk*, 16 Jul; *mirror.co.uk*, 17 Jul 2023.

For other Ripper suspects, see *FT* 155:6, 43-47, 310:36-41, 320:18-19, 334:40-46 419:28-35.





## LONG TERM LOANS

Outrageously overdue library books returned

PAGE 8



## HAUNTED HOSTELRIES

Black Swans and other pubs with polts

PAGE 14



## WEIRD SCIENCE

Studying phone calls from the dead and more

PAGE 23

# CARNAC GETS SMALLER | French mayor's major megalithic mishap



ABOVE LEFT: Megalithic rows in Carnac, Brittany. ABOVE RIGHT: Local mayor Olivier Lepick granted planning permission for 39 of the stones to be destroyed to make way for a branch of the DIY store Mr Bricolage in what he describes as an "administrative error".

Carnac in Brittany, in the northwest of France, has the largest array of megaliths in the world. It is estimated to contain more than 3,000 menhirs in rows, dolmens (stone tombs), tumuli (burial mounds) and as single standing stones. They date from the Neolithic period, with most of the stones being erected around 3300 BC, 1,000 years before Stonehenge, although some may date back as far as 5000 BC. As with Britain's prehistoric stone monuments, their purpose is believed to have been ritual and some show astronomical alignments. There were once many more stones at Carnac, but over the centuries many were destroyed for building materials, while some of the dolmens were repurposed as sheds or sheepfolds and even built into houses.

In recent years, though, the monument has been given the highest level of archaeological protection and is seen as one of the great treasures of France

with a bid in progress to give it UN World Heritage Site status. As a result, massive uproar resulted when 39 of the older stones were destroyed to build a branch of the Mr Bricolage DIY store. The stones were between 50 and 100 centimetres (20-40in) tall and were outliers from the main stone alignments in the region, so lay outside the protected area.

"The site has been destroyed," said local archaeologist Christian Obeltz, but local mayor Olivier Lepick said that he had "followed the law" and that checks on the area that had been carried out before he granted planning permission found only objects of "low archaeological value". He also said that the area was not protected and was earmarked for commercial use. The Regional Office of Cultural Affairs for Brittany, which is responsible for protecting cultural monuments, said: "Given the uncertain and in any case non-major character

of the remains, as revealed by checks, damage to a site of archaeological value has not been established," but Obeltz says that "There weren't archaeological excavations in order to know if the stones were menhirs or not."

Lepick said that the furore had made him the most hated man in France. "Everything is in place for me to get lynched," he said, adding that he and his family were under police protection. "They threatened to burn my house. They threatened to kill me for being a traitor." He considered the fuss overblown, as if he had "destroyed the Mona Lisa", but admitted that allowing the menhirs to be knocked down was an "administrative error". Mr Bricolage DIY chief executive Stéphane Doriel said: "I'm not an archaeologist, I don't know menhirs; low walls exist everywhere. If we'd known that, we'd obviously have done things differently." *france24.com*, 8 Jun; *lbc.co.uk*, 15 Jun 2023.

## EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

### DAD FOUGHT OFF LEAD THIEVES IN HIS PANTS

Salisbury Journal, 16 Mar 2023.

### Badgers stop building homes for 800 refugees in Gelderland

DutchNews.nl, 19 April 2023.

### HOUSE OF LORDS EATEN BY MOTHS

Sunday, 15 Jan 2023.

### The zombie apocalypse will be good for the hardworking people of this country

Irish Times, 15 July 2022.

### THE FRONT LINE FACING PUTIN'S ZOMBIE ARMY

D.Mail, 13 Feb 2023.

### Trump explodes over tax reports

Sunday, 1 Jan 2023.





## SIDELINES

### THE LAUNDRETTE EXPLODES

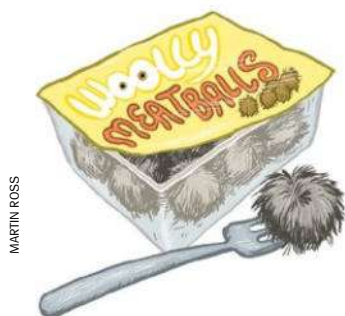
A laundrette customer in Coruna, Spain, had a lucky escape. CCTV shows him leaving the building seconds before a tumble drier violently exploded, blowing the shopfront out and tearing the laundrette sign off the building. It is thought that a butane-filled cigarette lighter had been left in the pocket of something that had gone through the wash and the heat of the drier had ignited it, although lithium-ion batteries in phones and chargers can also explode in tumble driers. [au.news.yahoo.com](http://au.news.yahoo.com), 4 Apr 2023.

### IT'S YOUR FUNERAL

Funeral directors have reported a rise in the deceased making unique requests for their final exit. One man asked to be dressed as Santa in his coffin and another was sent off in full Elvis gear. Other requests include asking for pick n' mix sweets to be thrown into the grave instead of earth, while a Sugar Puffs fan wanted all their mourners to dress as the Honey Monster. One request that was refused, though, was from a man who wanted his family to eat his body, as cannibalism is illegal in the UK. *D.Star*, 23 Feb 2023.

### MAMMOTH TREAT

Cultured meat startup Vox has created a meatball made of lab-grown mammoth meat to stimulate debate about the technology. Using publicly available genetic sequences from mammoth remains discovered frozen in Siberia, Vox filled in the gaps in the genome with equivalent sequences from African elephants, then implanted the results into a sheep cell. This was then grown in a lab until they had enough cells to make the meatball. It has not, however, been tasted, even by its creators, and is not going to be turned into a commercial product. [9news.com.au](http://9news.com.au), 29 Mar 2023.



MARTIN ROSS

## METEORITE MAYHEM

More heavenly missiles come crashing to Earth



HOPWELL TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT

### HIT BY A METEORITE?

A woman in Schirmeck, in Alsace, France, was having coffee with a friend on her terrace when she was hit by what is believed to be a meteorite, leaving her with bruises. "I heard a big 'Poom' coming from the roof next to us. In the second that followed, I felt a shock on the ribs. I thought it was an animal, a bat!" she said. Having realised it was not an animal, she "thought it was a piece of cement, the one we apply to the ridge tiles. But it didn't have the colour." She consulted a roofer, who said that it was not cement, but looked like a meteorite. She then took it to geologist Thierry Rebmann who said that the rock appeared to be a mixture of iron and silicon, which made it likely to be a meteorite. It seems that the meteorite struck the unnamed woman's roof and broke into fragments, one of which struck her.

Astronomers estimate the chances of being hit by a meteorite are more than a trillion to one. The earliest report of someone being struck by one is in a manuscript published at Tortona, Italy, in 1677, which claims that a Milanese friar was killed by a meteorite, although this is impossible to verify. The only other people known to have been hit by a meteorite are Anne Hodges of Sylacauga, Alabama, who suffered heavy bruising

### *In 1954 a young Ugandan boy was hit by a meteorite fragment*

from a grapefruit-sized one that crashed through her roof, bounced off a radio and struck her side in 1954, and a young Ugandan boy from Mbale who was hit by a small meteorite fragment in 1992. It weighed 3g (0.1oz) and had bounced off a tree before hitting him, so he was uninjured.

Doubt, though, has been cast on the veracity of the French woman's claim with Observatoire de Paris astronomer Jeremie Vaubaillon saying after seeing pictures of the supposed meteorite: "The pictures CLEARLY show this is NOT a meteorite! These rocks have way too many angles to be meteorites". True meteorites are usually smooth, having had their surface melted by the heat produced by atmospheric friction, but the angles seen on the fragments could be the result of a smooth object shattering on impact with the roof. If confirmed as a genuine meteorite, it will be only the fifth one retrieved in France this century. [newsweek.com](http://newsweek.com), 14 July; [weather.com](http://weather.com), 15 July; [space.com](http://space.com), 18 July 2023.

ABOVE: The meteorite that smashed through Suzy Kop's roof in Hopewell Township, New Jersey. OPPOSITE: The mysterious Bogdanovitch fires.

### ONE POTATO...

A potato-sized meteorite smashed a hole in the roof of a house in Hopewell Township, New Jersey, in May. The rock crashed into a bedroom, bounced off the hardwood floor and ended up in a corner, still warm. Suzy Kop, whose family live there, initially thought someone had thrown a rock at the house, saying: "I did touch the thing because it thought it was a random rock, I don't know, and it was warm. I just thank God that my father was not here. No one was here, you know, we weren't hurt or anything." A hazmat team called to the house by local police in case it was some sort of radioactive material declared the rock safe and confirmed it was a meteorite. It is thought that it came from the Eta Aquarids, a regular meteor shower that was taking place at the time of the fall and which consists of debris left behind by Halley's Comet, through which the Earth passes every spring. The meteorite was collected by researchers from the College of New Jersey for further analysis, while astronomer Kevin Conod said that the last one recovered from New Jersey was in 1829. [newjerseynews.com](http://newjerseynews.com), 9 May; [apnews.com](http://apnews.com), 9 May; [editionscnn.com](http://editionscnn.com), 9 May 2023.





## SOLAR SMASH

When a meteorite landed on the balcony belonging to brothers Gianfranco and Pino Losignore and their parents in Matera, Italy, they did not immediately realise what had happened. “My mother was in the basement and heard a loud bang. She was worried, but it was quite a windy day and so thought it might have been the branch of a tree,” said Gianfranco. “Never would we have expected it to have been a meteorite.” It was only three days later when the brothers were checking their solar panels and found one was damaged that they discovered the balcony was littered with grey fragments. Researchers had been tracking the fireball, so knew roughly where it would have landed and were searching the area for fragments when they were contacted by the family. In all, the Italian National Institute of Astrophysics retrieved 70g (2.5oz) of material and have named the meteorite after the brothers. Astrophysicist Carmelo Falco said that the institute was particularly pleased with the material they found, because having fallen on a balcony, “the material is very pure as it did not touch soil or water, almost as if we collected it from space.” *Guardian*, 20 Feb 2023.

## FIERY FALL?

In Russia, on the evening of 11 April, the day before the country celebrates Cosmonauts Day, a suspected meteorite was seen falling 50 miles (80km) east of the city of Yekaterinburg, followed by a loud blast. After the impact two “rings of fire” appeared in a field in the town of Bogdanovitch; local authorities linked these to the meteorite, although these are usually not hot enough to cause fires on landing. Indeed, there is some confusion as to whether the object seen in the sky really was a meteorite, as there was a fireworks display taking place at the same time and one of the videos taken of the object shows it descending against a backdrop of fireworks. This uncertainty was only increased the next day when the mayor of Bogdanovitch, Oleg Neifeld, took to social media to deny that anything had fallen in the city the previous evening. The event coincided with a balloon



flap taking place in Russia, with reports circulating that an unmanned balloon had fallen in the Vsevolzka district, later said to be a weather probe, and that another had fallen near St Petersburg. This was presumably triggered by the Chinese spy balloon panic in the US (FT430:28-29), with the Russian public already twitchy about potential drone attacks connected to their war against Ukraine. *express.co.uk*, 12 Apr; *newsyou.info*, 13 Apr 2023.

## PROBABLY NOT ALIENS

The sighting of a “green fireball” over Las Vegas at about 11.50pm on 30 April also left a good deal of confusion in its wake. It was reported by people from across Nevada, California and Utah and caught on bodycam by members of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. About 40 minutes later, police received a call from a Las Vegas resident saying, “We just see in the corner of our eye something fall down from the sky, and it was with lights, and when it hit down there was like a big impact, and we felt like an energy? And then we hear like a lot of footsteps near us. And then – we have, like, big – a big equipment, and we see there’s a, there’s like an eight-foot person beside it and another one’s inside, and it has big eyes and it’s looking at us. They’re very large. They’re like eight-foot [2.4m], nine-foot [2.7m], 10-foot [3m] and they’re not human. One hundred per cent, they’re not human.” Officers sent to the scene, said: “I’m not gonna BS you guys, one of my partners saw something fall out of the sky, too.” However, they did not find anything, and while the resident had pictures of people he said were looking at the aliens, he did not produce any shots of

the aliens themselves. Pictures posted later that were supposed to show aliens required considerable suspension of disbelief to see anything more than a fence, while some rather better images circulated online turned out to have been AI-generated. The resident also claimed that “a perfect circle” in gravel outside his property had been produced by the ship the aliens landed in, but this was later shown to be present in Google Earth images dating from at least a year before the incident. Police investigated, with plainclothes officers visiting the family causing “Men in Black” rumours, but they closed the case as “unfounded”. NASA confirmed that the fireball was a meteor and that it was travelling far too high to have landed in a Las Vegas yard and probably hit the ground far to the west or landed in the Pacific. *nypost.com*, 8 Jun; *abc7.com*, 9 Jun; *sputnikglobe.com*, 12 Jun; *vice.com*, 13 Jun 2023.

## COSMIC CORGI

At about 6pm on 16 February a meteor struck the ground near McAllen, Texas, with locals reporting a sonic boom and claiming to have felt an earth tremor. NASA, rather charmingly, described the meteor as being about the size of a Pembroke Welsh Corgi and weighing around the same as four baby elephants: 60cm (2ft) in length and weighing half a ton (454kg). Meteorites are typically heavy for their size as they are mostly metal. It was travelling at about 27,000 mph (43,452kph) and exploded around 34 kilometres (21 miles) above the ground, with fragments being scattered across Texas without causing damage or casualties. *jpost.com*, 21 Feb 2023.

## SLIGHTLY DISAPPOINTING

NASA’s InSight lander has made the first audio recording of meteorites hitting Mars. The 11-second clip records three pieces of rock weighing around 200kg (440lb) slamming into the planet, leaving 24ft (7m) craters. Rather than dramatic bangs, though, the sound of the impacts through the thin Martian atmosphere is more like the “bloop” produced by pebbles thrown into a pond. *D.Mail*, 21 Sept 2022.

## SIDELINES

### ROAD RAGE FAIL

Incensed by the behaviour of a fellow road user, a driver in Paulding County, Georgia, pulled a gun on them. However, he managed to pull the trigger before he had fully drawn the weapon, seriously wounding himself, resulting in an emergency dash to hospital. *D.Mirror*, 11 Feb 2023.

### GOOFY LIVES

Vets in New York have reported a 400 per cent increase in stoned dogs since cannabis was legalised in the city. Often, the dogs have eaten discarded joints, but others are affected by second-hand smoke or eating cannabis-laced chocolate or marijuana gummies. The dogs typically show up with dilated pupils, loss of balance, trouble walking, nausea and hallucinations. Dogs are particularly vulnerable because they have many more cannabinoid receptors than humans, so are affected by even small doses. *Irish Independent*, 14 Feb 2023.

### YOU’VE HAD YOUR CHIPS

Staff at ATIK nightclub in Wrexham, North Wales, opened a lost handbag in the hope of finding the owner’s ID. Instead, they found it was full of chips. After the find was posted on social media one commenter responded: “It’s Wrexham. Nothing is surprising”. *D.Star*, 28 Feb 2023.

### POKÉMANIAC

Drug dealer Raymond Phillips, 41, was convicted of being part of a “highly sophisticated” drug network and sentenced to five years in prison. In court, though, police said that while they had kept him under surveillance for a year before arresting him, most of the time he had been wandering about on his own playing Pokémon Go rather than doing drug deals. *Sun*, 24 Feb 2023.

### BIBLICAL?

Landlord Rob Alexander is mystified by the plague of frogs that descends on his pub, *The Bay Horse* in Totnes, Devon, every February. They congregate on the garden steps; but, says Alexander, “They go after a week or two – I’m not entirely sure where.” He suspects his pub is on an ancient migration route that frogs have followed for thousands of years on the way to their mating ponds. *Sun*, 24 Feb 2023.





## SIDELINES...

### FOOT FEAR

While the Salish Sea Coast of North America has seen more than 20 severed feet wash up inside shoes (**FT407-26**), this is far from the only place where it happens. Users of Petone Beach in Wellington, New Zealand, have been unsettled by the discovery of one there. "We bring our kids down here. You're not sure if you're going to find the other one," said one beach user. *Metro*, 28 Mar 2023.

### CHECKED, MATE

When an inexperienced new competitor in the Kenyan Female Open Chess Tournament beat several strong players, it raised the judges' suspicions. Millicent Awour, playing dressed in a burka and wearing glasses, was also wearing rather masculine shoes and never spoke. "We didn't have any suspicion at first, because wearing a hijab is normal," said Chess Kenya president Bernard Wanjala, but when confronted "Millicent" was unmasked as experienced male player Stanley Omondi. Omondi apologised, saying he'd entered because he had financial difficulties and thought winning the competition would help, but instead he earned himself a ban from competitive chess. *BBC News*, 14 Apr 2023.

### WHY?

A group of men in Wyoming have set a world record for the longest beard chain. Each had a beard at least 8in (20cm) long and they clipped them together to form a chain that totalled 150ft (46m). *Metro*, 14 Nov 2022.

### CUT OFF

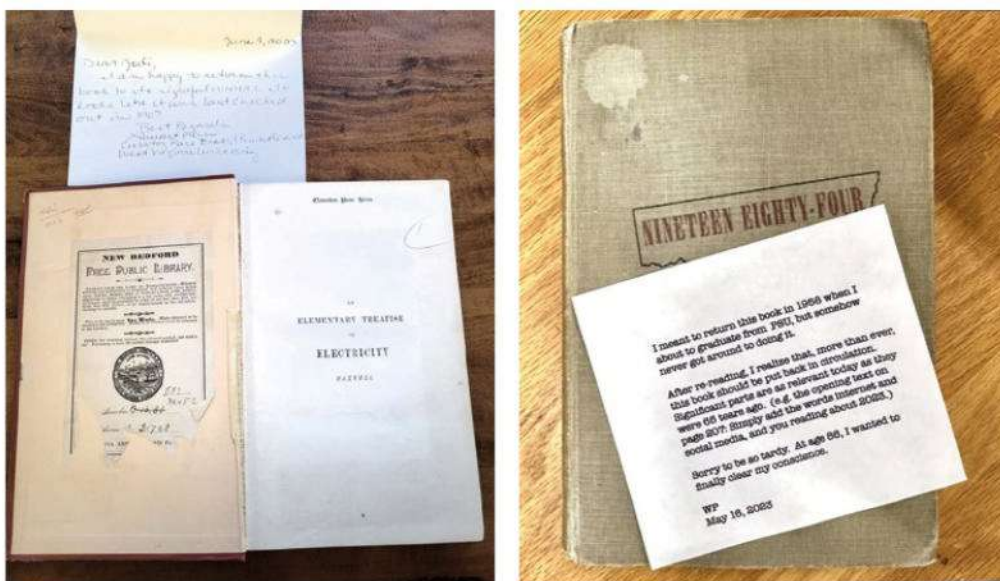
Police in Mobile, Alabama, were initially baffled when they responded to a call from a city gas station to report a severed penis found in their parking lot. Investigations revealed that the organ belonged to a motorcyclist who had been killed in an accident on the interstate outside the city, but they could not explain how it ended up miles away in a gas station car park. *dailycaller.com*, 31 Jan 2023.



MARTIN ROSS

## LONG TERM LOANS

Another shelf full of incredibly overdue library books



ABOVE LEFT: *An Elementary Treatise on Electricity*, borrowed in 1904, along with a note from finder Stuart Plein. ABOVE RIGHT: *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: checked out in 1958. BELOW: Paddy Riordan returns the book taken out by his late grandfather in 1938.

Stuart Plein, curator of rare books at West Virginia University Libraries, was sorting through new donations when he found a copy of James Clerk Maxwell's *An Elementary Treatise on Electricity* that had clearly, at one point, been in the collection of the New Bedford Public Free Library. It did not have a "withdrawn" stamp to indicate that the library had disposed of it, so was likely to be extremely overdue. Plein contacted Jodi Goodman, the special collections librarian in New Bedford, who discovered that this particular volume had been borrowed from the library in 1904 and never returned, so Plein sent it back. "This came back in extremely good condition," said library Director Olivia Melo. "Someone obviously kept this on a nice bookshelf because it was in such good shape and probably got passed down in the family." She said that the library sometimes receives books as much as 10 or 15 years overdue but has never before received anything even close to a century overdue, let alone 119 years. She added, "The

*A book overdue by 119 years would have racked up a \$2,100 fine*

value of the printed book is it's not digital, it's not going to disappear. Just holding it, you get the sense of someone having this book 120 years ago and reading it, and here it is in my hands, it is still going to be here 100 years from now.

The printed book is always going to be valuable." At the library's five-cent-per-day late fee, a book overdue by 119 years would have racked up a fine of more than \$2,100, but the library's late fees are limited to a maximum of \$2. *[AP]* 8 Jul 2023.

- In October 2022, Paddy Riordan returned a copy of *Red Deer* by Richard Jeffries to the Earlsdon Carnegie Community Library near Coventry, 84 years and two weeks after it had been borrowed by his late grandfather William Humphries. He had borrowed it for his daughter Anne, Riordan's mother, among whose possessions Riordan found the book after she died. The book was due back on the 11 October 1938 and having calculated that the book was 4,385 weeks overdue, Riordan also paid the library £18.27, the equivalent to the pre-decimal penny a week fine that was charged in 1938. "It's such a lovely piece of the library's history and an interesting thing for us to see," said Lucy Winter, Community Engagement Co-ordinator at the library. "[Mr Riordan] was so



NEW BEDFORD FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY / MULTNOMAH COUNTY LIBRARY

EARLSDON CARNEGIE COMMUNITY LIBRARY





ABOVE: David Hickman returns *The Law for Motorists* to Dudley Library, 58 years late. BELOW: An anonymous return after 50 years.

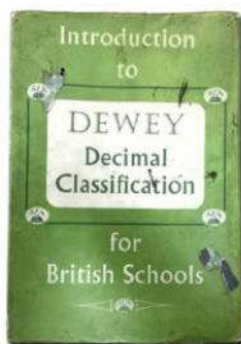
nice and it was so kind of him to donate the fine back to the library." *coventrytelegraph.net*, 27 Oct 2022.

• Sixty-five years after it was borrowed, an 86-year-old man identified only as WP returned a copy of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to Multnomah County Library in Portland, Oregon, saying in a note included with the book, "I meant to return this book in 1958 when I was about to graduate from [Portland State University], but somehow never got around to doing it," adding "Sorry to be so tardy. At age 86, I wanted to finally clear my conscience." He said he was prompted to return it because "Significant parts are as relevant today as they were 65 years ago," pointing to a section of page 207 and saying, "Simply add the words internet and social media, and you reading about 2023." A spokesperson for the library said there would be no fine for the late return: "Conscience cleared." *BBC News*, 16 Jun 2023.

• In 1964, when he was 17 and living in Dudley, West Midlands, David Hickman was fined £7 for dangerous driving after he hit the town mayor's car while waving to a group of schoolgirls. To prepare for his court appearance, he borrowed *The Law for Motorists* from Dudley library, but, after losing the

case, forgot to return it. He still had the book when he moved to London in 1970 and, Hickman, now 76, says, "I used to come across it now and then and think 'I must pop that back next time I'm in Dudley,'" but never did. However, in early 2023 he decided to make a special trip to return it to the library in person. On arriving at the library, he discovered that, with overdue fines running at 20p a day, he theoretically owed them £42,000, given that the book was 58 years late, but after he told them his story, they waived the fee. "Fortunately, they saw the funny side," he said. *D.Mail*, 21 Jan 2023.

• An amnesty at North Tyneside libraries gave retired civil servant Lesley Harrison, 70, an opportunity to return a German textbook, *Ich Lerne Deutsch*, 56 years late without having to pay a £2,000 fine. She had borrowed it at age 14 in 1966 to help her with O-Level work, but then forgot about it. "The staff were shocked and amused when I brought it in," she said, "but it was in good condition – I look after my books." *Metro*, 9 Feb 2023.



• Fifty years after it was borrowed by a local headteacher, a copy of *Introduction to the Dewey Decimal Classification for British Schools* by Marjorie Chambers, a book about library organisation, was returned anonymously to Nantwich Library. It had been taken out in late 1972 and was supposed to have been returned by 30 January 1973. "Some of the

information in this volume may be slightly outdated," said a library spokesperson. *D.Express*, 29 Dec 2022.

• An anonymous reader found a copy of the Rosemary Sutcliffe novel *Knight's Fee* while clearing out their parents' house and realised that it was supposed to have been returned to Alnwick library in Northumberland by 27 March 1981, making it 42 years late. They returned it with a note saying "I must apologise profusely on behalf of the family", but the library responded by saying, "There are no late fees or fines, just a warm welcome back for you and our books," and is now offering a prize for any book returned after an even longer absence. *Sun*, 13 Jan 2023.

## SIDELINES...

### ITALIAN JOB HEARSE

In a heavy snowstorm, a hearse carrying an organ donor had to swerve to avoid an erratic driver while making a steep climb on Interstate 70 in the Colorado mountains. Losing control, the hearse driver spun off the road and ended up with the vehicle's front half dangling precariously over a sheer drop. However, due to the weight of the corpse in the back keeping the vehicle balanced, the driver was able to crawl to safety. Reporting the incident, CBS news said: "One organ donor can save up to eight lives. This particular individual can take credit for one more." *autoblog.com*, 18 Apr 2023.

### NO FIT STATE

The Mayor of Newark, New Jersey, Ras Baraka, was proud to announce his city's twinning with the emerging Hindu city state The United States of Kailas. However, many people then contacted him to say that the state doesn't actually exist beyond its website. It is the creation of the guru Swami Nithyananda, who has a reputation as a scammer and who fled India in 2019 following rape accusations. The city withdrew from the partnership after admitting it had been duped, but locals asked: "Whose job is it to do a Google search and figure out it's a fake city?" *Metro*, 17 Mar 2023.

### SKELETON STIR

Police were called to a residential street in Labrador, Queensland, Australia after a resident reported a skeleton in a storm drain. Once extracted, the skeleton turned out to be a replica used by medical students, but following the discovery, pools of blood and some dentures were found in adjacent streets with the combination of the various discoveries causing a stir on local social media. *Gold Coast Bulletin*, 16 Dec 2022.

### HEART HORROR

Staff at a department of transport facility in McEwen, Tennessee, working on a salt pile in preparation for road gritting, found what looked like a human organ embedded in the salt. Tests at the state medical examiner's office in Nashville identified it as an adult male human heart, preserved by the salt, but there was no clue as to how it had wound up in the gritting facility. *Irish Independent*, 17 Dec 2022.





## SIDELINES...

### NOISE ANNOYS

A 72-year-old hospital patient in Mannheim, Germany, was arrested for twice switching off the oxygen equipment of a patient in a neighbouring bed "after feeling disturbed by the noise emanating from [it]". The first time she switched it off she was warned by hospital staff that it was vital for her neighbour's recovery, but she still did it again later. After the second incident, the 79-year-old patient had to be resuscitated and needed intensive care, while the woman responsible was arrested and admitted to a "correctional facility". *editioncnn.com, 2 Dec 2022.*

### AI INVASION

Neil Clarke, editor of the highly regarded online science fiction magazine *Clarkesworld*, was forced to shut down his submissions portal after he was overwhelmed by stories produced by artificial intelligence chatbots like ChatGPT. Prompted by online advice that sending chatbot generated stories to magazines was a quick way to make a profit, AI users were flooding the site faster than Clarke could wade through the stories. "We were being buried," he said, adding that "the irony of being a magazine that publishes sci-fi that is flooded with stories written by AI isn't lost on me." *buzzfeednews.com, 23 Feb 2023.*

### CONFIDENCE TRICK

Paraglider Aaron Hall, 23, from the Isle of Wight, had to be rescued by a boat after plunging from a height of 3,000ft (900m) into the sea off Ölüdeniz, Turkey, after his parachute got tangled up. It was Hall's first flight and part of a course he'd taken to "build up confidence". *Metro, 9 Jun 2022.*

### BROMLEY PHARAOH

A commuter travelling from King's College in central London to St Mary Cray station in Bromley, Kent, late on the evening of 13 March, was bemused to find a full-sized replica Egyptian sarcophagus lying on the pavement outside the station. "I just burst out laughing a bit because I didn't think something could get more random than some Egyptian sarcophagus lying down outside a train station," he said. "I also feel like it just fits the peculiarity of London so well." *newsweek.com, 20 Mar 2023.*

## SATANIC SIGNAGE | Hell freezes over and Poland's bus route of the Beast gets renumbered



ABOVE: Hell froze over in January 2019. BELOW: Poland's 666 bus route to Hel has been renumbered after complaints.

### IT'S FINALLY HAPPENED...

In January 2019, Hell froze over. The small town of Hell, Michigan, was caught in a polar vortex that descended on much of North America and, as a result, temperatures plunged to -26C (-14.8F) and the town froze. Its website, which offers people the opportunity to become "Mayor of Hell" for a day – for which you get horns, a T-shirt, mug, badge, wallet card, dirt from Hell and various other benefits – posted a message announcing, "Yes, Hell has frozen over," adding that despite this, they had not had as much snow as in other winters. *standard.co.uk, 21 Jan 2019.*

### HIGHWAY TO HEL

Poland's 666 bus route to Hel will no longer be taking tourists to the seaside town on a beautiful peninsula north of Gdansk. PKS Gydnia, the company that operates the route, posted on social media that "This year we're turning the last 6 upside down! 666 to 669".

Although at first no explanation was offered for the



change, it appears to have come about as a result of complaints from Christian groups that rather than being a harmless joke, the famous 666 bus route was anti-Christian propaganda. In 2018, Fronda, a conservative Catholic website, published an article describing the 666 bus route as a "Satanic stupidity," adding that it "undermines the Christian order of the Polish state and its foundations, and,

hence, all of us." PKS Gydnia spokesperson Marcin Szwaczek said: "The management board buckled under the weight of letters and requests that were sent to us, maybe not in large numbers, but cyclically for many years with a request to change the line number." The renumbered route was due to start operating on 24 June. *D.Telegraph, 14 June; Sky News, 20 June 2023.*



# Do you want to reach some customers whose loyalty and curiosity is

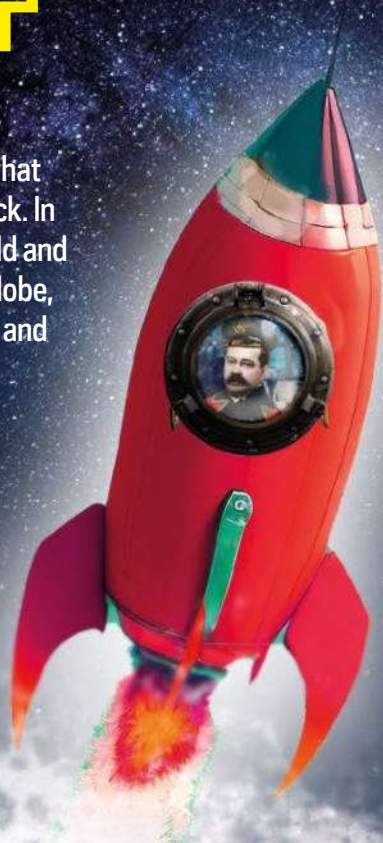
# OUT OF THIS WORLD?

The world of strange phenomena is what makes the team at **FORTEAN TIMES** tick. In every issue we present an array of odd and interesting stories from across the globe, investigating modern-day mysteries and delving into historical curiosities.

From cryptozoology and conspiracies to paranormal research and weird science, we deliver the news you won't find anywhere else.

And strange but true... an advert in **FORTEAN TIMES** probably costs a lot less than you would think.

If you would you like to promote your business to over 14,000 likeminded and loyal **FORTEAN TIMES** subscribers, who have plenty of disposable income to boot, then email [james.kellock@metropolis.co.uk](mailto:james.kellock@metropolis.co.uk) for further details.





## PAUL DEVEREUX discovers puzzling pits in Bedfordshire and outsize handaxes in Kent



ABOVE LEFT: An alignment of three of the Mesolithic Linmere Pits uncovered in Bedfordshire. ABOVE RIGHT: The largest of the giant Kent axes being measured.

### HOLY HOLES?

The Beatles may have told us about 4,000 holes in Blackburn, Lancashire, but now archaeologists are telling us about 25 monumental Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic) holes that have been uncovered in Bedfordshire, England – and there may yet be more to be discovered. The holes or pits are at Linmere, near Houghton Regis, and measure 5m (16.4ft) wide and 1.85m (6ft) deep, each circular with steep sides, and some broadening out to form a wider base. They would have been major undertakings c.7,000-8,000 years ago. They are by far the greatest concentration of such features anywhere in England or Wales. But what were they for? So far, nobody can figure that out. They wouldn't have been suitable for food storage – so that can be ruled out.

The pits occur in various alignments up to half a kilometre in length and relate to the courses of former stream channels – an odd factor that makes archaeologists suspect that there could have been some sort of spiritual significance to them. (It may be worth noting that the much later – Neolithic – and equally mysterious linear earthen monuments called 'cursuses' also often related to streams and rivers.) The only contents found in any of the Bedfordshire pits has been a scatter of animal bones in some instances. Researchers are also checking if any of the alignments point to astronomical bodies.

These pits would have been created at a period in British prehistory when the ice sheets were receding and the sea was rising, cutting Britain off from Continental Europe, so archaeologists are hopeful that studying these unexpected discoveries will deepen their knowledge of a poorly known era. *Live Science*, *Guardian*, 3 July 2023.

### EARLY IMMIGRATION

While the standard story is that people reached North America by around 12,000-15,000 BC, evidence for the earlier human inhabitation of South America continues to turn up, if generally contested by many mainstream archaeologists. This time, the claim is that finds indicate human presence as early as c.25,000 BC. They are found in the long archaeologically studied Santa Elina cave in Brazil's Mato Grosso, in the form of giant ground sloth bones. Specifically, the bones that formed the osteoderms, the protective bony protrusions, on the now extinct creature's back. Three of these seem to have been modified by humans into pendants, being polished and with drill-holes, and, moreover, found in geological layers that date to at least c.25,000 years ago. *Live Science*, 12 July 2023. (Original paper in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2023.0316>)

### BIG CHOPPERS

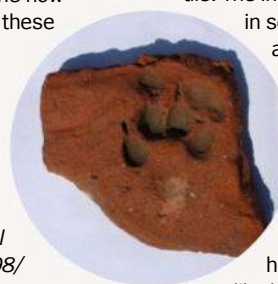
Researchers from University College London have uncovered some 800 stone artefacts dating to approximately 300,000 years ago, at a rare Ice Age site in Kent. The finds include two 'giant handaxes': a stone handaxe was made by chipping (knapping) a piece of rock, usually flint, on both sides in order to shape it into a symmetrical, sharp-pointed object with a cutting edge. It would be held at the broader, blunter end. Stone axes are not uncommon finds in archaeological excavations, but objects this size are unusual; the longest of the two exceptionally large ones measures 29.5cm (11.7in).

"These handaxes are so big it's difficult

to imagine how they could have been easily held and used...", says Letty Ingrei (Senior Archaeologist, UCL Archaeology South-East). She adds that "right now, we aren't sure why such large tools were being made, or which species of early human were making them." *PhysOrg news*, 6 July 2023.

### LEAVING ITS MARK

While excavating a second-century AD Roman site in Romania, archaeologists encountered a homely sight – the almost 2,000-year-old imprints of a large dog's paws on a roof tile. The indentations were discovered



in settlements that once existed adjacent to a Roman fort, Apulum, in the modern Romanian city of Alba Iulia. Presumably, the animal had been bounding about a builder's yard where the mud tiles were drying out in the sun. The archaeologists also found the imprints of hobnails of caligae (Roman sandal-like boots), traces of bird tracks, and

cat prints. All the domestic activity of long-ago, bringing the far past to life. *Newsweek*, 7 April 2023

### CURLY TOP

You would never think it, but scientists (at Penn State University on this occasion) have been studying why people have curly hair. They say that because we originated in Africa, with a powerful overhead sun, the head received an undue amount of heat, and curly hair they found to have an especially cooling effect, allowing the body to retain more water. If it had not been for this evolutionary adaptation, apparently, our brains might not have been able to develop to today's size. *Science Daily*, 7 June 2023.





# CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 287: HAD DRINK TAKEN

Apart from the innumerable Greek, Roman, and Byzantine sources, you can drink in much more from Mark Forsyth's *A Short History of Drunkenness* (2017), also Max Nelson's *The Barbarian's Beverage: A History of Beer in Ancient Europe* (2008) based on his 2001 doctoral thesis – researched/ written in the pub?

“Charles was not much of a drinker” – Steinmeyer's biography of Fort, p71.

It's a cliché that Britain has a drinking culture. Many ancient civilisations did as well. Egyptian pictures show partygoers copiously vomiting. Their god of drinking, Shezmu, was also the divine spirit of blood and death – what were the streets of Memphis and Thebes like on Friday nights? See Jimmy Dunn's ‘Getting Wasted in Ancient Egypt’ and Caroline Seaforth's parallel essay, both online.

We don't (yet) know that much about the Etruscans – ignore all that DH Lawrence tripe about blood and sperm in Etruscan Places. But as a character in Aldous Huxley's *Those Barren Leaves* (1925) remarked: “Ever since I learned the Etruscans called the god of wine Fufluns, I've taken the keenest interest in their language. *Fufluns* – it couldn't be better.”

The Greeks had Dionysus, Romanly transformed into Bacchus. Bettany Hughes proposed in a BBC TV programme (11 April 2018 – synopsis online) that “As someone who could turn water into wine, had a human and divine parent and had been killed and risen again, Bacchus does have an intriguing amount in common with Jesus.”

“Take a little wine for thy stomach's sake” – Paul, 1 Timothy 5. 23)

When hovering between Christianity and Islam, Vladimir, Prince of Kiev (c. AD 958-1015) plumped for the former because it allowed alcohol, observing: “Drinking is the joy of all Russia; we cannot exist without that pleasure.”

Not that vodka was yet their favourite tippie. The word did not appear until 1405, described as a promoter of fertility and lust. Given the links between mediæval Russia and Byzantium, it's worth noting (various articles online) that the latter is frequently thought by modern historians to have had a booze problem.

Back to the Greeks. Homer mentions Pramnian wine sprinkled with goat's



LEFT: A man plays *kottabos* in the artwork on a terracotta kylix or drinking vessel.

cheese (a feta *accompli*). In CP Snow's *The Masters*, classicist Pilbrow exclaims: “Can anyone imagine how horrible that must have been?” He'd probably have thought the same about the Northern habit of putting a pickled onion in your pint of beer...

It's not always remembered that ‘Symposium’ in Greek denotes a common drinking session. Plato and Xenophon both wrote eponymous dialogues starring Socrates, later burlesqued by Lucian, who ends his party with fisticuffs and rape.

Famous Athenian man-about-town Alcibiades broke into Plato's, already sozzled. According to stage comedian Eupolis, he was the first man to pee into a chamber pot during dinner, not a procedure many would approve, though host Trimalchio did in Petronius's *Satyricon* novel.

One individual was chosen ‘King of the Feast’, his job being to decree the proportions of wine to water – imbibing unmixed wine was considered ‘Not Done’. Guests went in for drinking songs (origin of our Rugby ones?) and *Kottabos*, a kind of tiddly-winks played by flicking drops of wine into a bowl.

A character in Plato's *Laws* proclaims: “Drunkenness is a science of some importance.” He develops the notion that teachers can understand their pupils' true nature by observing them under the influence – never had that at my school. See Peter Jones's *Spectator* essay (9 Jan 2016, online), inspired by Rugby and Ampleforth schools introducing “a little

beer” at dinner – we never had that either. As Jones concludes: “They are merely offering something they probably get at home already. What conceivable educational value is there in that?”

Æschylus in his play *Suppliant Women* sneers at the Egyptians for drinking beer. By contrast, mercenary Athenian soldier/historian/Socrates fan Xenophon immediately became enamoured of Armenian beer:

“Floating on the top of the drink were the barley-grains, and in it were straws which you have to put into your mouth and suck. It was an extremely strong drink unless you added water, and

extremely good when you got used to it”

– one might feel the same way about the likes of Newcastle Brown Ale...

Pliny's list of Spanish ales includes *Cervisia*, thus giving us the one Spanish word every Brit on the Costa del Sol knows – *Cerveza*.

Macedonia was another drinking culture. According to JM O'Brien, *Alexander the Great: The Invisible Enemy* (1992), its most famous product ended up a sot, thus expediting his early demise.

Not so his Roman admirer Julius Cæsar, described by one political enemy as “the only sober man to wreck a country.” Augustus was similarly temperate – shades of *Private Eye*'s running joke about Harold Wilson and Wincarnis.

By contrast, Tiberius was so fond of the bottle that Roman wags punningly changed his name from Tiberius Claudius Nero to Biberius Caldius Mero = Drink-loving Hot With Wine.

Though the only emperor allowed into Dante's heaven and commonly regarded as one of Rome's best rulers, even his warmest admirers admitted Trajan was too fond of drink (and boys). Most impressive statistic concerns Maximinus the Thracian, who could down an amphora (roughly 6-7 gallons) in a single session.

Let's totter off with this Steinmeyer story (p72) of Fort struggling home after an uncharacteristic night on the beer. Exclaiming “You never saw such a drunken boy,” wife Anna “ran down to the street and grabbed her husband by the shoulders spanking him all the way upstairs.”





## Black swans

ALAN MURDIE finds that pubs named after a certain waterfowl seem to be magnets for hauntings



**ABOVE LEFT:** The Black Swan in Rixton with Glazebrook, home to a 'White Lady', a phantom electric organ and sudden cold spots, among other phenomena. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Barrie Green became the licensee of the Black Swan in 1969 and wondered if the ghost of previous landlord Pat McHale was the problem.

Being in the wrong place when a ghost is seen is nothing unusual for a ghost hunter, as I was personally reminded myself in April 2023. Regrettably, other commitments meant I missed this year's Weird Weekend North conference held at Rixton with Glazebrook in Cheshire over the weekend of 1-2 April. While attending the 2022 event I stayed at the Black Swan hotel in the village and heard some intriguing stories of a recent haunting in the building from members of staff. So my regrets were all the greater and more vexing on discovering that during the course of this year's conference a female apparition was spotted in the building by one of the guests attending the weekend.

As a commentator on social media put it: *One night, for a specific event in the village – the Black Swan was the right place to stay... Black Swan is a lovely Inn, and it's haunted! Someone we know saw the White Lady, but no harm done. The Black Swan is terrific!*

Behind this is a credible account from a gentleman who described seeing the figure of a woman in a white dress in an upstairs corridor, which went on to vanish without explanation. Fortunately, also attending Weird Weekend North was Claire Davy, Secretary of the Association for the

### "Suddenly the room went very cold, even though I knew the heating was fully on"

Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP), who immediately gathered further details of the sighting direct from the witness. It is always important to record such experiences as soon as possible, to guard against the details of a strange experience becoming distorted or embellished in the mind of the witness or even being completely forgotten as time goes on. As the late Hilary Evans used to say about UFO sightings, "first-hand is the only hand" when it comes to evidential testimony.

Getting experiences reliably recorded in material form is also important in the assessment of a location, to determine if a sighting is consistent with or varies from previous accounts, and particularly when it is suspected a place may possess more than one ghost. That this could be so with the Black Swan is a strong possibility following the discovery of a story in the

local *Cadishead and Irlam Guardian* for 31 October 1969, that unexplained phenomena in the building were leading its then licensee Mr Barrie Green to contemplate an exorcism.

A former barman, Mr David Lowndes of Cadishead, spoke of awakening in the night at the pub and hearing the hotel's electric organ playing and a sound like footsteps moving across the ceiling near the bar. In November 1968 Mr Lowndes encountered an apparition while left in charge when the then licensee was out at a party.

"At about 3am I was reading a book in the vault and only two lights were on over the bar," he said. "Suddenly the room went very cold, even though I knew the heating was fully on. Sensing that something was wrong, I looked up through the doorway into the bar and clearly saw the figure of an old man with silver hair sitting by a table. The man was as large as life and he was rubbing his nose with his hand. At first I thought I had locked a customer inside when I had closed the pub, but when I called, he disappeared."

Mr Lowndes also witnessed wine bottles on shelves rattling and shaking without any apparent cause and thought he saw the movement of a figure behind the



shelves. "I ran upstairs to bring another person who worked at the pub, but when I returned the bottles had stopped rattling." Such events dented his previous scepticism.

These were the pre-Internet days when newspaper journalists actually left their desks and made local enquiries, tracing witnesses and canvassing locals for quotes and opinions. The press learned the pub was known for doors opening and closing unaccountably and interviewed Mrs Jean Dee, another employee, who recalled how on Christmas Day 1968 she tried to open the inside door between the bar and the kitchen. "As I took hold of the door handle I felt the door tug sharply away from me, just as though someone was pulling from the other side of the door – but there was nobody on the other side of the door." According to Mrs Dee, customers considered these incidents were seasonal, always taking place between October and March each year.

Local opinion held the ghost was a former publican called Pat McHale who had died around 20 years before. In life

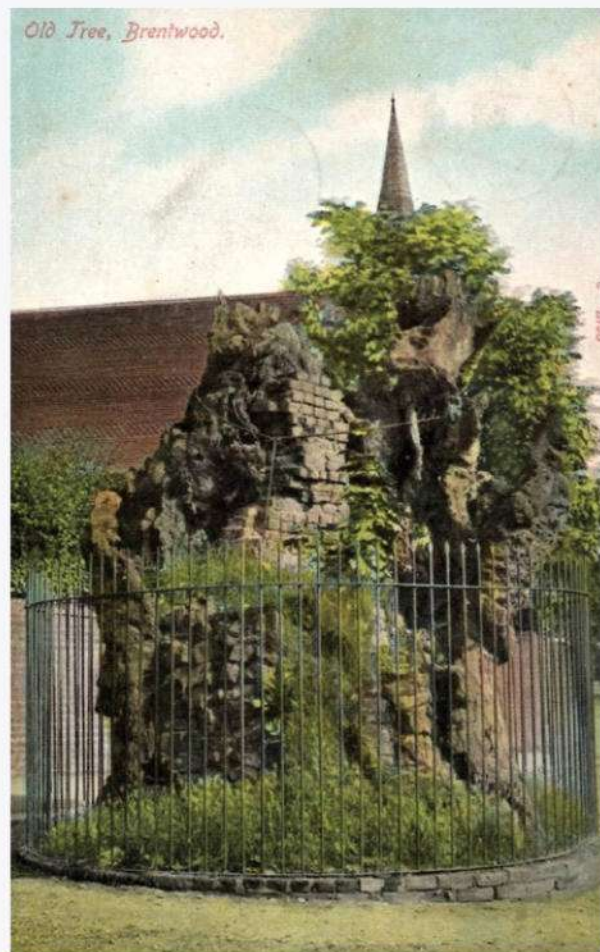
'Old Pat' presided over the bar for nearly 50 years and was well-known for his fierce Irish temper, stomping around in clogs and keeping a pet goose called Clarence "as good as any guard dog". Mr McHale reputedly told customers before his death: "No one will have this pub after me. This is my pub and it stays mine."

In considering an exorcism, Mr Green noted the strange fact that "no licensee has stayed here any longer than 18 months since 'Old Pat' died; most have left within a year." Such a pattern has been found at other haunted hostleries, for example the Seven Stars at Robertsbridge, which saw 12 changes in 32 years. Others suggested the Black Swan was suffering visitations by a former barman who died suddenly in 1950 after a party.

So who is the ghostly lady who turned up in April this year? A sorrowing widow of a previous licensee, or the shade of a conscientious staff worker, or a guest? Has she supplanted 'Old Pat' or the postulated spectral barman? Or is she a wholly different class of apparition?

Such questions are much easier to pose than answer because pub ghosts, as a genus, tend toward anonymity. Beyond broad attributions of gender – which in the spirit world, as with this one, ultimately matches the sometimes-unburied bones of the deceased – time and again pub ghosts are rarely identified with any certainty and repeatedly consist of odd, physical manifestations of a rather puckish character.

Looking at a few other pubs named 'The Swan' or variants thereof around the country confirms this trend. For instance, the White Swan in Dunstable, Bedfordshire, made national news in February 2022 with a ghost being blamed for knocking a pint of Coors beer off a table (**FT423:20**). The moment the glass plunged to the floor by itself was recorded on CCTV, with the security footage later posted on the pub's Facebook page. Natasha Magnam who had worked there for 20 years said she had never seen anything like it before but she felt presences around the bar. Windows open by themselves, staff hear strange noises



**ABOVE LEFT:** The Swan on Brentwood High Street was the scene of such severe poltergeist activity that the landlord called the police. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The phenomena were thought to be connected to Protestant martyr William Hunter, burned at Brentwood in 1555. The Martyr's Oak once marked the site.





THE BLACK SWAN DEVIZES

**ABOVE LEFT:** Ye Olde Swan in Woughton, Milton Keynes, “one of Dick Turpin’s old haunts”. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The Black Swan in Devizes, Wiltshire, home to the ghosts of a woman, a young boy and a former owner. **BELOW:** Bone fragments were found in the pub’s cellar, but were probably of animal origin.

and an unexplained figure was seen by a cleaner (*D.Mirror*, 15 Feb; *The Independent*, 16 Feb 2022).

As stated, it is necessary to accurately collect testimony of such incidents as soon as possible since an inherent tendency to romanticise can easily take over in the case of stories of phenomena in historic inns (whether or not helped along the way by alcohol).

A good example is at Ye Olde Swan pub in Woughton on the Green at Milton Keynes. On nights of the full moon none other than Dick Turpin himself is said to dash past on a phantom steed. How this was ascertained is wholly unclear. (*Buckinghamshire Live*, 5 May 2021).

Reports of a poltergeist haunting at the Swan at Brentwood High Street, Essex, go back to at least 1963 (*Morning Advertiser*, Sept 1963; *The Haunted Pub Guide*, 1985, Guy Playfair) with effects which became so intense at one point the landlord twice called out the police. For some unfathomable reason, manifestations were linked to the teenage Protestant martyr William Hunter, 19, burned at Brentwood in 1555. Doors unlocked themselves, cold spots were experienced, dogs reacted strangely, and a telephone was interfered with inside a locked room. Between 1953 and 1968, poltergeist activity also repeatedly broke out at the nearby Seven Stars pub (later converted into a bakery). At the Swan it appears phenomena waned with the passing of time. When last visiting in summer 2013, I was told all was quiet. I scarcely expect any resumption, given the Swan is now flanked by fast-food outlets, shabby shops and soulless chain stores rendering it an area where “no ghosts or legends can flourish” (James Wentworth Day in *Essex Ghosts*, 1973).

## Spectres include a Victorian workman in a bowler hat and “a pair of legs without a body”



Other pubs seek to boost existing haunted reputations for commercial reasons. In October 2022 the historic Black Swan pub in York announced it was running a special season of ghost hunting evenings. One of the oldest pubs in the city, its name dates back to a time when the term ‘black swan’ was metaphor or conceit denoting something deemed strange or impossible and everyone in Europe believed swans were uniformly white. It was used by enterprising taverners to make their hostelries stand out, demonstrating the fashion for giving pubs silly names as an attention-grabbing gimmick is not a modern one. At least this was the case before a species of black swan was discovered in Australia (the phrase ‘white raven’ operated the same way until these were identified too – see *Bird Life and Lore* (1909) R Bosworth-Smith).

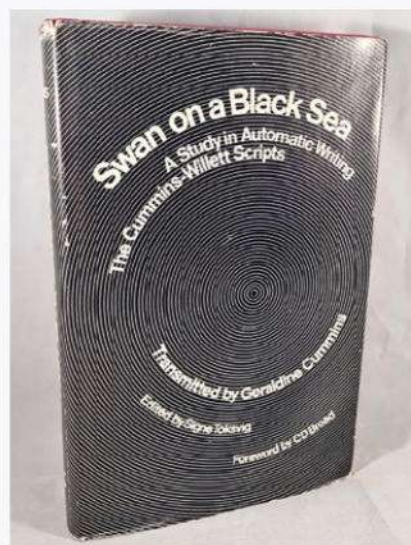
Nowadays the customer draw is paranormal activity, the Black Swan

vaunted as the scene of “many a chilling tale” featuring the “numerous ghosts said to frequent the building”. Spectres include a Victorian workman in a bowler hat and “a pair of legs without a body that walk around the landlord’s private quarters”. Fully integrated into York’s thriving ghost tour industry, the pub offers the chance to be taken on a private ghost walk with a guide from the original Ghost Walk of York – which celebrates the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its foundation next year – followed by a two- or three- course meal.

One may confidently expect an increase in phenomena through the very process of drawing potentially impressionable people into a place in anticipation of an uncanny encounter, exacerbated by just how readily some people assume, without evidence, a paranormal explanation for unusual but normal events. Equally, others are wholly unwilling even to consider such a possibility, demonstrating how the objective standpoint attempted by the psychical investigator seems foreign to many people today.

Potentially even more haunted than the Black Swan in York is its younger namesake standing in Devizes, Wiltshire. Overlooking the marketplace, Room 4 at the Devizes Black Swan is haunted by a “young woman in a flowing dress who materialises from the wall [who] glides to the chair by the window and sits down”. Upper portions of the pub date from 1737, but its brick cellar may be 17<sup>th</sup> century. Periodically revisiting is the shade of a former owner who lived a double life; outwardly respectable by day, he turned to highway robbery at night. Apparently, people holding vigils also report the spirit of a boy aged between five and nine. Only enhancing its reputation was the





**ABOVE LEFT:** Irish medium Geraldine Cummins. **ABOVE CENTRE:** Mrs Winifred Coombe Tennant, who had died in 1956, was also a noted medium under the pseudonym of 'Mrs Willett'. **ABOVE RIGHT:** *Swan on a Black Sea* was a record of Cummins's channelling of post-mortem messages from 'Mrs Willett'.

discovery of small fragments of bone in the cellar by filmmakers from the Sky One programme, *Britain's Most Haunted*, in 2005. The bones were thought by the TV show to have belonged to a child (whether claims of a ghostly child pre-dated this find is unclear). The discovery led a concerned viewer to call the police, prompting an investigation by Wiltshire coroner David Masters. He discontinued this once tests revealed the remains were over 200 years old. Fragments were then passed to the Wiltshire Heritage Museum, who considered the remains were not human at all but likely to be from an animal, possibly a sheep.

One puzzle was why these bones had not been found previously. Perhaps the highwayman operated a side-racket in sheep stealing, though probably the most parsimonious explanation is they were merely discarded after some antique Sunday dinner at the time of Samuel Pepys's tour of Wiltshire. (Sources: 'Bones find in haunted pub', *Wiltshire Gazette and Herald*, 20 Jan 2005. <https://www.haunted-britain.com/black-swan-hotel-devizes.htm>.)

Finally, if one wants to avoid pubs called the Swan altogether and pursue more abstruse and literary investigations into survival after death, one might turn to a forgotten classic, *Swan On A Black Sea: A Study in Automatic Writing* (1965) written by the Irish medium Geraldine Cummins (1890-1969) and edited by writer Signe Toksvig (1891-1983), the aunt of TV comedienne and personality Sandi Toksvig. It describes how between 1957 and 1960 Cummins channelled an extensive series of communications obtained via automatic writing. She believed the pen in her hand might be guided by the spirit of Mrs Winifred Coombe Tennant, who had

died on 31 August 1956, aged 82. These scripts contained much factual information about the past of Mrs Coombe Tennant and various places associated with her. People who had known the deceased in life, including her two sons, were impressed.

Aside from their clarity and coherence, these messages are of special note since Mrs Coombe Tennant had herself been a celebrated medium. Over 50 years earlier, using the pseudonym 'Mrs Willett', she participated in a long-running series of mediumistic communications known as the 'cross-correspondences'. Spanning many years, these involved a large volume of complex material stemming from widely separated mediums. Received in isolation the individual messages made no sense but when combined together some believed they fitted like pieces of jigsaw or code to transmit meaningful messages from identifiable personalities including the classical scholar Frederic Myers (1847-1901), a founder of the Society for Psychical Research (see **FT324:51, 335:48-49, 348:17, 376:34**).

As with all subjective psychic impressions, the difficulty is determining what originates purely in the mind of the psychic and what might come from beyond. This problem arises with even the simplest parapsychological tests, whether qualitative or quantitative. With the successful guessing of Zener cards in telepathy tests the possible psi significance arises out of any overall departure from what would be expected statistically as the mean score. Higher than average scores or 'hits' may arise more frequently than would be expected by chance, suggesting something unusual is going on, but just how does one distinguish exactly between

the operation of psi abilities or spirits and a pure coincidence?

Geraldine Cummins enjoyed a long and prolific career as a medium. It was often proposed her scripts were a product of her subconscious, with sceptics pointing to her being a novelist and playwright in her own right, or even attributing to her heightened information gathering abilities from having worked as a spy. However, Signe Toksvig's husband, himself a dramatist and sceptical about survival, reportedly read the Coombe Tennant scripts opining: "That settles it... I've read Geraldine's fiction. She could not possibly have invented Mrs Willett."

Interestingly, the deceased Mrs Coombe Tennant stated channelled communications were a 'mixed grill' composed of memories from the communicator and the mind of the medium, the spirit being forced to select these from its host and work with them.

Professor CD Broad, who provided the introduction to the book, thought survival by Mrs Coombe Tennant was the simplest and most plausible hypothesis for the content of the scripts, but also emphasised the inconceivability for most contemporary Westerners of a person still existing once the earthly body has died and disintegrated. Broad also made some acerbic observations concerning the likely defects of the post-mortem population if personalities really pass over unchanged and human survival is universal.

Unlike many mediums, Geraldine Cummins was not completely convinced herself. Again unusually for a sensitive, she laid no claim to spontaneous psi experiences in childhood, the only hint of her later interest and abilities being her enjoying as a girl acting out the roles of Shakespeare's ghosts.



## RELIGION NEWS

An incorrupt Benedictine Sister brings pilgrims to Missouri, while a Carmelite nun faces accusations involving sexting and drugs



ABOVE LEFT: Sister Wilhelmina Lancaster in life....ABOVE RIGHT: And her incorrupt body surrounded by her fellow nuns of the Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Apostles order.

### INCORRUPT NUN

Four years after her death at the age of 95, the body of Sister Wilhelmina Lancaster, founder of the Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Apostles in Lancaster, Missouri, was exhumed in April in preparation for the relocation of her remains to a planned shrine in the abbey's oratory. As she had been buried in a simple wooden coffin without being embalmed and the soil of Missouri is damp clay, the nuns expected to find just bones. However, on opening the coffin the current abbess, Mother Cecilia, said: "I thought I saw a completely full, intact foot and I said, 'I didn't just see that', so, I looked again more carefully." Instead of bones, inside the coffin Sister Wilhelmina's body and habit were intact, as were her crucifix, rosary, and veil. All were covered with a superficial layer of mould, but otherwise had not decayed, although the fabric lining the coffin had completely rotted away. "We think she is the first African American woman to be found incorrupt," said Mother Cecilia.

Incorruptibility is a status granted by the Catholic Church to remains that have been preserved from decay by divine intervention. Bishop James Johnston of Kansas City, in whose diocese the abbey falls, said the process of assessing Sister Wilhelmina had not yet begun. "The condition of the remains of Sister Wilhelmina Lancaster has understandably generated widespread interest and raised important questions," he said. "At the same time, it is important to protect the integrity of the mortal remains of Sister Wilhelmina to allow for a thorough investigation." This has not stopped pilgrims flocking to the abbey to pay homage to Sister Wilhelmina, with up to 15,000 people a day queuing to see and touch the body before it is placed in a glass case. One visitor, Michael Holmes, said: "We're here to see the miracle. It's a once in a lifetime for some of us, and we've never been this close to a possible saint who's lying uncorrupted." While incorruption alone is not enough to qualify someone for

sainthood, and Sister Wilhelmina has not been dead for the required five years that needs to pass before the process of canonisation can begin, the sisters are hopeful that this will be possible.

Nicholas Passalacqua, director of forensic anthropology at Western Carolina University, is sceptical about the miraculous nature of Sister Wilhelmina's preservation, saying "In general... we expect it will take roughly five years for the body to become skeletonised, so, for this body, which was buried in a coffin, I personally don't find it too surprising that the remains are well preserved after only four years." Rebecca George, an anthropology instructor at Western Carolina University, added that the 'mummification' of un-embalmed bodies is not uncommon and that bodies could stay preserved for many years if allowed to. She also said that coffins and clothing can help to preserve bodies. "Typically, when we bury people, we don't exhumate them. We don't get to look at them a couple years out,"

George said. "With 100 years, there might be nothing left. But when you've got just a few years out, this is not unexpected."

For more on Sister Wilhelmina and other incorruptibles, turn to p.44. *D. Telegraph*, 28 May; *independent.co.uk*, 29 May; *nbcnews.com*, 31 May 2023.

### INCORRUPT HEART

Further along the path to sainthood is Pauline Jaricot, a lay prayer leader and social worker from Lyons in France, who died aged 62 in 1862. She was beatified, the first step towards sainthood, in 2022, after Pope Francis accepted that in 2012 she had interceded to save the life of a three-year-old girl who was in a coma after choking on a sausage. Jaricot's heart was removed on her death and kept as a relic in the church of Saint Polycarpe in Lyons, where it has remained incorrupt. Now, medical experts have given their verdict on the state of the organ, confirming it was not embalmed and saying there was "No evidence that was inconsistent with natural and spontaneous





conservation not mediated by the hand of man, which can be considered a miracle by the Roman Catholic Church, could be retrieved.” They also found no trace of the heart disease that Jaricot had been suffering, confirming that she had been miraculously cured on a visit to Rome in 1837, an event that had been recognised by the then pope, Gregory XVI. Jaricot now needs to be credited with a second posthumous miracle to achieve full sainthood. *Times*, 10 Feb 2023.

## CORRUPT NUN?

Reverend Mother Superior Teresa Agnes Gerlach, former head of the Carmelite Monastery of the Most Holy Trinity in Texas, is suing Fort Worth Bishop Michael Olson after he dismissed her over claims that she broke her vow of chastity. The 43-year-old nun, who has complex health issues and is confined to a wheelchair, was accused of having a sexting relationship with a Montana priest with whom she exchanged explicit messages over a period of several months. Gerlach claimed she had not broken her vows as the relationship was never physical, but the Bishop decided otherwise and issued a decree of dismissal, removing her from her position. The priest, Father Philip Johnson, is “not currently exercising” public ministry, according to his diocese, and “[His] priestly faculties were restricted... as a precautionary measure until more clarity regarding his status



can be ascertained.” Sister Gerlach claims she was suffering ill health and was not in her right mind during the sexting and is suing Bishop Olsen for \$1 million, accusing the bishop of defaming her and invading her privacy by allegedly seizing her phone during the investigation, which he denies. Meanwhile, the Bishop has opened an investigation into illegal drug use at the monastery and has alerted police to “serious concerns” about marijuana and edibles he claims were discovered there. Sister Gerlach’s lawyer maintains the

charges are fabricated and that the diocese staged the photos they claim show the drugs. *dailystar.co.uk*, 30 Jun 2023.

## HOLY MULTIPLICATION

The Pontifical Mariana International Academy is apparently taking an interest in an alleged miracle that took place during the celebration of Mass at St Thomas Catholic Church in Thomaston, Connecticut. At the end of the ceremony on 5 March, a visibly moved Father Joseph Crowley told the congregation: “One of our eucharistic ministers

LEFT: A portrait of Pauline Jaricot and the reliquary containing her incorrupt heart. BELOW LEFT: Reverend Mother Superior Teresa Agnes Gerlach has been accused of breaking her vows of chastity.

was running out of hosts and suddenly there were more hosts in the ciborium. God just duplicated himself in the ciborium. It’s really, really cool when God does these things, and it’s really, really cool when we realise what he’s done, and it just happened today”. As well as PAMI, the Archdiocese of Hartford is also investigating the alleged multiplication. *catholicnewsagency.com*, 26 Mar 2023.

## DIVINE JUSTICE

In the early hours of 14 January, Carlos Alonso, 23, jumped over the fence around the Church of Christ the King in Monterrey, Mexico, while drunk. He broke a glass door and entered the church, where he grabbed a statue of St Michael the Archangel and attempted to flee with it. However, while escaping through the smashed door, Alonso stumbled and fell, impaling his neck on the statue’s sword. The Catholic Church sees St Michael the Archangel as the defender of the heavenly host and the helper of the armies of God against the Devil, and he is frequently depicted brandishing a sword, sometimes with a dragon symbolising the Devil being trampled beneath his feet. A passer-by spotted Alonso slumped in the church doorway, bleeding heavily from his wound, and called the emergency services. They cut the padlock on the church gate and took him to hospital where he was treated before being turned over to the police; meanwhile, the statue was returned to its rightful place in the church. Lupita, a local shop owner in Monterrey, said: “That happened to him for doing bad things. Saint Michael is for protection, to combat evil – I think that’s why that happened to him.” *catholicnewsagency.com*, 17 Jan; *dailymail.co.uk*, 20 Jan 2023.





### KARL SHUKER shares a pair of intriguing cryptozoological reports garnered online

Amid all the fake news, trolling, and general Internet insanity, some extremely interesting and potentially significant cryptozoological reports periodically filter through to me online, but which have not been published in any hard-copy format (and hence safely preserved for the foreseeable future, as opposed to the all-too-ephemeral existence offered by the Web). So I always strive to document such reports formally to ensure their survival and accessibility for other researchers. Here, therefore, are two more that have come to my attention recently.

#### BEARDED IN ITS AQUATIC DEN?

After my AZ report concerning an apparent giant eel reputedly encountered by a deep sea diver off Vietnam in or around 1974 (FT427:21), American correspondent Susan Swiatek contacted me online in mid-June 2023 via my ShukerNature blog with the following fascinating account, presented here in her own words:

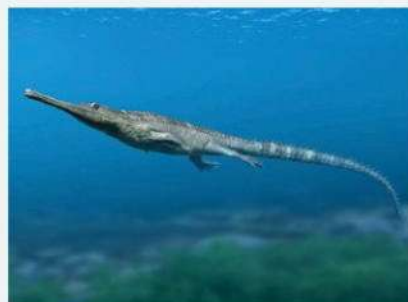
"This account [my above-noted AZ one] validates a witness who told me his story. The man fought on the US side during the Vietnam War [1955-1973]. At some point the South Vietnamese wanted to build a bridge and were blasting to clear rock so they could build the footing for the bridge. After the blast, a lot of fish and debris were hurled up. Among them was a snake or eel 80 to 90 feet [24-27m] long (in his estimation). It had been killed by the blast. No one said anything, but men were ordered to quietly push it back in the river. I can still remember the drawing he did of the head, which had slanted eyes and a beard-like appendage on the chin."

Assuming that this is a genuine case (as is required if attempting to analyse such reports), was the creature in question an eel, a snake, or something else entirely? I'm not aware of any known snake with a beard or beard-like structure on its chin, whereas certain fishes do possess whisker-like barbels (catfishes in particular) or even beard-like sensory 'feelers' (the marine cusk eels provide a good example). It is also intriguing to note that in traditional Eastern mythology, water dragons are often described as exceedingly long, serpentine in form, and bearded. Might the cryptid featured in this report have inspired such legends?

Speaking of its estimated length, this might easily have been a shock-induced exaggeration, but even if we



ABOVE LEFT: The bearded cusk eel, *Brotula multibarbata* with its striking beard-like sensory feelers  
ABOVE RIGHT: A reconstruction of the thalattosuchian *Gavialinum rhodani*.



allow for a considerable margin of error on this basis, the creature must still have been extremely sizeable, far more so than anything of this nature recognised by mainstream zoology. Also of importance is that whereas my previous Vietnamese giant eel (or eel-like entity) was a marine creature, this present one had been killed in a river, i.e. freshwater. However, some species of eel famously do journey between marine and freshwater abodes during their life cycles, so might it have been a marine form that had made its way upstream into the river in which it was subsequently killed?

Whatever it was and wherever it came from, if described truthfully this animal does not match any living species currently known to science. Susan Swiatek, *ShukerNature*, 15 June 2023.

#### FLIPPED AND FEARSOME!

My second report was tweeted to me publicly on Twitter in June 2023 by follower Legendary Cryptids, who had in turn publicly received it as a series of tweets from fellow follower Nicobar Archipelago on 30-31 May. Here they are:

"Knew a guy who was an oil rig mechanic... I lost contact with him a long time ago, but his job was the [sic - to] survey the underwater section of the platform's legs, checking for any damage or signs of concern. He had to scuba dive for this and would sometimes be underwater for quite a while. So one day he's examining the leg and saw something out the corner of his eye. He turned and saw what he thought was a huge crocodile. Then he realised a) wtf is a croc doing in the middle of the ocean and b) its appendages looked more like flippers than regular croc feet. It didn't seem interested in him and just lazily swam past. He's sh\*tting himself and goes back to the surface and reports it.

Boss tells him to ignore it. He had no proof other than his word anyway, even if he did go public with the sighting. He'd spoken to other divers since, and apparently spotting weird marine critters isn't that unusual, but it's never made a big thing of as a) too much paperwork and b) who would ever believe them?"

I'm not currently aware of when or where (geographically speaking) this incident occurred, sadly. As for the described creature: the usual trio of prehistoric reptilian forms readily come to mind whenever a flippered crocodile-like entity is reported. Namely, thalattosuchians (flippered, marine crocodilian-related species), mosasaurs (flippered, mega-jawed sea lizards, sometimes of great size), and pliosaurus (flippered, long-jawed, crocodile-reminiscent plesiosaurs, again sometimes of great size). Officially these were all extinct by the end of the Cretaceous period 65 million years or so ago (the thalattosuchians a lot earlier).

In view of the vast array of often bizarre yet bona fide modern-day sea beasts known by zoologists to exist, but which are often entirely unknown to laymen, the diver's comment that spotting weird marine creatures isn't that unusual is in itself not unexpected. However, if the diver's description of what he saw that day was accurate, no known modern-day creature matches it. Yet I have collected and documented in various of my writings a notable number of similar sightings of such cryptids, all marine and from several different far-flung localities. So even if genuine, this mystery beast form is far from being unique, without precedent in the crypto-chronicles. If I can obtain more details, I'll present them in a future AZ report. Nicobar Archipelago, Twitter, 30+31 May; Legendary Cryptids, Twitter, 10 June 2023.





## HIDDEN CHARMS 4 | ROB GANDY reports from York on the fourth conference devoted to the magical protection of buildings

The fourth of the Hidden Charms<sup>1</sup> biennial conferences took place on 15 April 2023 in York's wonderful National Centre for Early Music, with Brian Hoggard again curating an array of excellent speakers to present on objects and symbols used to protect people from supernatural harm.

In front of a healthy audience of over 70 delegates, Brian opened with a re-appraisal of witch-bottles, in which he explored new evidence from beyond the UK and USA. He highlighted tensions between the related documentary evidence and archaeological evidence. Examples included the former describing witch bottles being boiled, while none of the 300 or so bottles found to date show any obvious evidence of boiling or heating; and despite most bottles containing hair and nail parings, there is no mention of such items in 17th century texts.

Next, Rosie Barrett took everyone up to the nearby North York Moors with a very interesting talk discussing the witch-posts that are held in the collection at Ryedale Folk Museum, together with the museum's approach to interpreting their witch-related objects. Items included Peggy 'Devell's' Magick Book from "which all that shall happen in any Life may be for(e)cast", and discs that might have been spell tokens.

After the coffee break, Anthea Hawdon gave a presentation with intriguing insights into clog almanacs (which are nothing to do with Dutch footwear). These are short pieces of wood carved to show details of Saints' days, lunar and solar festivals and the calendar. The associated symbols were set out, with examples of how many of these can be found in historic graffiti. Anthea received a huge round of applause.

Before lunch, Tony Hack detailed the work he and his team have been doing to survey the historic graffiti and other marks in Lacock Abbey, Wiltshire, which was founded in the 13th century by the Countess of Salisbury as a nunnery of the Au-



ABOVE: Tony Hack presents his survey of historical graffiti from Lacock Abbey. BELOW: Conference organiser Brian Hoggard appears in the guise of a bellarmine witch bottle.

gustinian order. His many great photos included daisy-wheels, heart-shapes and burn-marks, plus a drawing on a wall of a Civil War-era man smoking a pipe.

The lunch break allowed people to chat and/or head off to York's many hostelrys and cafes, but they were all back for Dr Petra Schad, who discussed how she developed her interest in dried cats before detailing her research into these unfortunate creatures and their use in Germany. The extent of the practice in her area (Ludwigsburg, near Stuttgart) was extraordinary. This even had two cats laid down crosswise, one upon the other, in Vaihingen an der Enz.

Val Thomas left her stall to talk about how many modern witches and pagans continue to practise magical house protection methods. She showed how these manifest as a living craft still at work today, drawing inspi-

ration from history and archaeology and adapting to the current environment. Examples included some lovely feathery witches' ladders and thread bottles, together with the usual suspects of daisy-wheels, bellarmine witch bottles and poppets.

Opening the fourth and

final session, Robyn Lacy gave a video presentation from Canada. She described her surveys of early US and Canadian burial grounds, which she searched for the use of the daisy-wheel/hexfoil/rosette as a protection symbol for the dead. A thorough and systematic study revealed a lot about the use of the symbol.

This was followed by a Q&A with her via Zoom, which was a lot of fun.

Following his excellent appearance at Hidden Charms 3, Belgian architect Marc Robben made a welcome return to talk about the use of protective patterns in brick buildings, largely

using coloured headers. He gave a number of examples from York itself, and explored the practice in Britain as compared to the Continent. There was a whole array of different signs used, some basic and some quite rare, with the details of certain fertility protection figures raising eyebrows! It was a fascinating insight into this clearly apotropaic practice.

In addition to the talks, there were stalls for Brian's Apotropaia, where he launched the book of the proceedings of *Hidden Charms 3* (available at [www.apotropaia.co.uk](http://www.apotropaia.co.uk)), author and witch Val Thomas ([www.valthomaswitch.co.uk/](http://www.valthomaswitch.co.uk/)), and Yorkshire's own John Billingsley, who provided Folklore Society information as well as the chance to buy his books). Brian also brought out a large 'end-of-the-pier'-style bellarmine witch bottle, created for photo-opportunities, causing much mirth and merriment in the breaks.

Brian concluded the conference by thanking everyone for attending. It had been a great success with much enlightenment, entertainment and engagement. Many delegates ended up getting together for a sociable drink afterwards; there was much to debate and discuss.

Where and when will Hidden Charms 5 take place? Keep checking Brian's website at [www.apotropaia.co.uk](http://www.apotropaia.co.uk) for details.





# THE C NSPIRASPHERE

**NOEL ROONEY** finds the hidden hand of the Tavistock Institute in a conspiracy to subvert the rock and roll counterculture, while the US Defense Department plans for depopulation

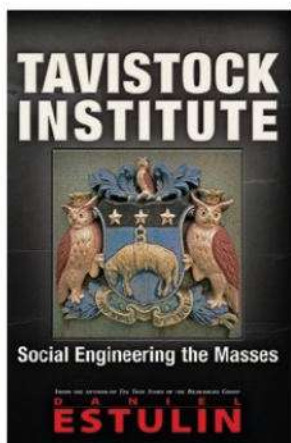
## TURN ON, DROP OUT

The Tavistock brand has taken a bit of a shellacking recently. The London-based Tavistock Clinic's treatment of children came under intense scrutiny during the ongoing furore over gender reassignment protocols for minors; some commentators suggested that gender dysphoria was more prevalent among the professionals working there than the young people. The ensuing fuss led to a lot of adverse publicity and forced the closure of the clinic.

The press reports spoke of children being pressured into taking medication and an organisational culture that was anything but benevolent. Some of the things being reported were, as more than a few commentators pointed out, eerily reminiscent of the kind of mind control experiments that were allegedly the bread and butter of MK-Ultra, back in the bad old days when the elite were busy oppressing us. Wait...

In the Conspirasphere, the Tavistock Institute, a separate body that developed out of the Clinic, has a long, varied, and often perplexing track record. A creation of the Committee of Three Hundred, according to some, and the secret ingredient in the Club of Rome, according to others, it has always been seen, by those who have eyes to see, as an instrument of control over the masses, and also of the illusory façade that passes for everyday reality among the blue pill demographic. If the institute is responsible for half of the skulduggery attributed to it by the C-sphere, it's the embodiment of Illuminati evil.

Daniele Estulin's compendious book on the Tavistock (*The Tavistock Institute*, 2015) placed it front and centre of a technocratic elite plotting to manipulate the minds and opinions of the masses so that a parallel



## *A parallel world of murder, war, fraud and oppression*

world of murder, war, fraud and oppression can carry on unhindered; think Operation Gladio as infotainment. And all of that, for the C-sphere, is indubitable; but there is a story that Estulin alludes to in his book that, I think, knocks mere world domination into a dusty corner.

It turns out that the Tavistock, when it wasn't busy manufacturing consent, found the time and inclination to invent rock and roll. To fully appreciate this story you need to engage with the idea of a world-famous (and famously snobbish) philosopher writing the lyrics for a pop group he regularly dissed in public; the lead members of famous groups dying and being replaced by body doubles; and little one-horse towns in California somehow producing the majority of America's rock stars for a generation.

Theodore Adorno, in this rendition, wrote the lyrics for the Beatles' greatest hits. If you can get your head round the author of *The Philosophy of Modern Music* penning 'She Loves You Yeah, Yeah, Yeah',

then the little matter of Paul McCartney mysteriously dying and being replaced by a double recruited by TPTB probably won't bother you much at all (for much more, see **FT384:30-37**). And the notion that a small town located next to a couple of military bases engaging in covert intelligence operations, the infamous Laurel Canyon, would populate the rock and roll hall of fame with the children of those very spooks might seem relatively normal (see **FT417:32-40**).

According to some, the Tavistock went further; it invented the very vocabulary of the rock generation: Beatnik, hippies, even the word 'rock' applied to music — all these terms and more are apparently the inventions of the cultural engineers. If you add in the proliferation of narcotic and hallucinogenic drug use (and thus co-opt Leary and co into the ranks of the sinister manipulators) you have a plot to effectively put a whole generation into a miasma of pointless behaviour (pop music and drugs are not universally popular in the C-sphere).

Why did the secret powers that rule us decide to turn the children of the 1960s and 1970s into addled zombies? It was, apparently, an effort to fragment the growing anti-war movement. The reasoning — that is, the reasoning as applied vicariously by observers of a very particular bent — was that Americans (God-fearing, hard-working, right-thinking Americans, that is) would be so turned off by the unedifying spectacle of an entire segment of the population turning on that they would cleave to the Establishment line.

While there are other conspiracies that can lay more claim to eviscerating the American liberal tradition — the four great assassinations of the 1960s in particular — I doubt there are any that could

claim a greater effect than the invention of a complete subculture designed to thwart an organic version of itself. If that is a claim we can lay at the door of the Tavistock Institute, one could almost admire them for it.

## DEAGEL DOINGS

The Deagel Report has a curious status in the C-sphere. The Deagel Corporation is affiliated to US military intelligence (they occasionally contribute to Stratfor assessments) and is consequently both a legend and an object of deep mistrust. In 2010, Deagel published a population forecast for 2025, suggesting that the US and UK in particular would suffer heavy depopulation. The forecast also suggested that Russia and China would be global hegemony by that date.

The forecast was taken down a couple of years ago, but intrepid users of the Wayback Machine have resurrected it, dusted it down and used it as damning evidence of the Covid 'plandemic'. The mysterious rise in excess mortality experienced in many countries since then (Bill Gates, Tony Fauci, vaccines; 'nuff said) has sparked even more interest.

As has the revelation that the US Covid response was led by the Defense Department. Clearly, They knew what was going to happen; and They kept Their hands on the wheel to make sure it went down. I suspect this version of the theory will grow in the coming months, and it will be worth keeping an eye on.

[www.spectator.co.uk/article/how-did-the-tavistock-gender-scandal-unfold/](http://www.spectator.co.uk/article/how-did-the-tavistock-gender-scandal-unfold/); <https://seemorerocks.is/a-new-look-at-deagels-depopulation-premonitions/>; [www.winterwatch.net/2023/07/the-tavistock-institutes-ties-to-the-birth-of-rock-n-roll/](http://www.winterwatch.net/2023/07/the-tavistock-institutes-ties-to-the-birth-of-rock-n-roll/)





## WEIRD SCIENCE

New research tackles phone calls from the dead, the relationship between sleep and paranormal beliefs and what happened at Tunguska

### PHONE CALLS FROM THE DEAD

Dr Imants Barušs, Professor of Psychology at King's University College at Western University, Canada, has been awarded a \$44,500 (£34,735) BIAL Foundation Grant for Scientific Research to investigate the phenomenon of after-death communication with mobile phones. "I've had an interest in the survival hypothesis – the hypothesis that consciousness can continue to exist, at least for a time, after the death of the physical body – since I was a child," says Dr Barušs. He was prompted to investigate the subject after *Wired* magazine contacted him to comment on the increasing number of people claiming to have been phoned by the dead. Working with Durra Kadiragha, a Health Sciences student from Western University, Dr Barušs went on to complete a pilot study involving 21 participants who claimed to have received phone calls (35%), photos or videos (20%), text messages (20%), non-vocal sounds during telephone calls or on voicemail (15%), or extraneous voices during telephone calls (10%), from deceased family members or friends. The BIAL grant will now allow him to expand on this.

"When we have phenomena we don't understand, we want to find the critical variables that have to do with those phenomena," he says. "It could be a psychological variable, or it could be the type of phone." The goal is to try and work out why some people appear to receive phone communication from the dead, while others don't. Barušs hopes his research will highlight the fact that an estimated one-third of the population believes they have had some sort of communication from the dead. "I think it's important to research the reports that people are having these kinds of experiences," he says. *kings.uwo.ca*, 18 May 2023.

For more on phone calls from the dead, see FT405:30-35.



ABOVE: A number of people claim to have received phone calls from the deceased.

### SLEEP ON IT

Scientists from Goldsmiths University of London have published a study in the *Journal of Sleep Research* that suggests there is a connection between poor sleep quality and paranormal beliefs. They surveyed 8,853 people about their personal sleep habits and beliefs relating to the paranormal. They found that the poorer the sleep quality experienced by the participants, the more likely they were to believe in ghosts, demons, the ability to communicate with the dead, the soul living on after death, near-death experiences as evidence for life after death, and that aliens have visited the Earth. They also found that isolated sleep paralysis and "exploding head syndrome", where a person experiences the sensation of an explosion happening in their head, were associated with "the belief that aliens have visited Earth." The researchers said: "For all associations, it was found that a higher level of paranormal belief was associated with a poorer subjective sleep quality, even when controlling for age and gender effects," adding that the study indicates "associations between beliefs in the paranormal and various sleep variables." They were unable to

come to any clear conclusions as to why this should be so, saying that the mechanisms connecting the associations are probably complex and will require more in-depth research, but some of the volunteers suggested that it might be the result of some of the more serious sleep issues causing visual and auditory hallucinations. What they do not seem to have considered is that the sleep disturbances might be the result of the participant's beliefs, with fear of demons, ghosts or aliens giving them restless nights, instead of sleep disturbance making them more susceptible to the beliefs. *popularmechanics.com*, 23 Jan 2023.

### TUNGUSKA TURBULENCE

The 1908 Tunguska event (FT1:12, 189:4, 411:42-43) was a 10 to 15 megaton explosion that flattened an estimated 80 million trees over 830 square miles (2,150 km<sup>2</sup>) of Siberia and is considered the largest asteroid impact on Earth in recorded history. However, despite many expeditions in the subsequent century, no impact site or asteroid fragments have ever been found. Various theories have been proposed to account for this. Papers published by Luca Gasperini, research director

at the National Research Council of Italy, identified nearby Lake Cheko as the impact crater due to its unusual conical shape and its size – about 1,640ft (500m) wide and 177ft (54m) deep – as well as evidence of trees at the bottom of the lake. It also has a 33-ft-wide (10m) anomaly at the bottom of the lake that could be a remnant of the asteroid.

This has been refuted by work by Denis Rogozin, from the Russian Academy of Sciences, who says that the lake contains sediments that are several hundred years old and that other lakes nearby have similar shapes, but are all of different ages. This means that unless there were several similar impacts, centuries apart, in this small area, the lakes cannot be impact craters. Gasperini has rejected these findings, but the Ukraine war has prevented him returning to Russia to test the anomaly in Lake Cheko to see if it is the asteroid. "The Russian scientists could easily do this test, instead of continuing to publish articles showing data similar to ours with very questionable interpretations," he says.

Other new research has offered alternative explanations. A 2020 paper by researchers from the Siberian Federal University published in *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society* proposes that Tunguska was caused by a large iron asteroid that skimmed through the Earth's atmosphere, then veered away back into space without breaking up, thus leaving no debris or crater.

However, a June 2023 paper by another group of Italian astronomers, posted to the arXiv preprint site, takes the opposite view and suggests that the asteroid broke up in the atmosphere, only leaving tiny fragments that would have impacted 10 to 12 miles (16 to 19 km) northwest of the epicentre, where they could still, in theory, be found, "even if the mud and vegetation could have made any trace disappear." *livescience.com*, 29 May 2023.

# FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS | More whales behaving badly, schoolgirl 'poisonings' spread to Afghanistan and Somerset Gimp charged

## REVENGE OF THE ORCAS [FT401:17, 412:21]



The pod of orcas, or killer whales, who took to attacking small boats off the Atlantic coast of Spain and

Portugal in 2020 have continued their assaults, sinking at least three boats, and now it is believed that their behaviour is being copied by other orcas in the area. The orcas use a specific technique to attack a boat; they approach from the stern and strike the rudder, continuing until the boat is disabled, after which they lose interest. German yachtsman Werner Schaufelberger, who experienced an orca attack on 4 May, said: "The little ones shook the rudder at the back while the big one repeatedly backed up and rammed the ship with full force from the side." He believes the orcas are teaching others how to attack boats. "The two little orcas observed the bigger one's technique and, with a slight run-up, they too slammed into the boat," he said.

After the attack, the coastguard rescued Schaufelberger and his crew and took their boat in tow, but it sank before they could get it into port. Another sailor, Greg Blackburn, whose yacht was also attacked, saw a mother orca who appeared to be teaching her calf how to charge into the rudder. "It was definitely some form of education, teaching going on," he said. Alfredo López Fernandez, a biologist at the University of Aveiro in Portugal who studies the orcas, says they "are doing this on purpose, of course. We don't know the origin or the motivation, but defensive behaviour based on trauma, as the origin of all this, gains more strength for us every day." He believes the attacks on small boats were started by an orca named White Gladis who experienced a "critical moment of agony", perhaps caused by a



ABOVE: Janet Morris and Stephen Bidwell were enjoying a sailing course off the coast of Morocco when they were subjected to an hour-long orca attack.

collision with a boat or getting entangled in fishing gear; it has also been suggested that she may have been pregnant at the time. "That traumatised orca is the one that started this behaviour of physical contact with the boat," López Fernandez said. "We do not interpret that the orcas are teaching the young, although the behaviour has spread to the young vertically, simply by imitation, and later horizontally among them, because they consider it something important in their lives." Since the orcas began attacking boats, four of those belonging to the subpopulation living in Iberian waters have died, although their deaths haven't been directly linked to encounters with boats. However, researchers are concerned about the orcas' behaviour, saying: "If this situation continues or intensifies, it could become a real concern for the mariners' safety and a conservation issue for this endangered subpopulation of killer whales."

The latest casualty was *Team JAO*, a yacht competing in the Ocean Race that was attacked by orcas off Gibraltar in one of

their most southerly assaults. Skipper Jelmer van Beek said that it was "a scary moment," adding: "Three orcas came straight at us and started hitting the rudders." Once the sloop slowed down the Orcas backed off, but it meant that the team dropped from second to fourth on that leg of the race. The Iberian orca pod also damaged two more boats in early June, a 48-foot catamaran captained by Daniel Kriz who felt an "unusual motion of the boat" before a pod of four or five orcas tore his rudder off, while Iain Hamilton was marooned in a harbour near Gibraltar after five whales wrecked both of his boats' rudders in what he described as a "choreographed" assault that left the vessel "very vulnerable and in a very dangerous situation."

Meanwhile a yachtsman off Scotland experienced what is believed to be the first orca attack on a boat in UK waters. Dr Wim Rutten, 72, had just set out from Lerwick in Shetland when the orca rammed the boat from behind. Rutten was fishing off the side of his boat when he saw the orca, which swam straight at him and repeatedly

rammed his boat creating "soft shocks" through the aluminium hull. "What I felt [was] most frightening was the very loud breathing of the animal," he said. The orca stayed behind the boat "looking for the keel. Then he disappeared... but came back at fast speed, twice or thrice... and circled a bit. Maybe he just wanted to play. Or look me in the eyes. Or to get rid of the fishing line." Commenting on the appearance of this behaviour 2,000 miles (3,219km) from the Iberian whales, Conor Ryan, a scientific adviser to the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust, said: "I'd be reluctant to say it cannot be learned from [the southern population]. It's possible that this 'fad' is leapfrogging through the various pods/communities." *livescience.com*, 18 May; *[AP]* 1 Jun; *theguardian.com*, 21 Jun; *dailyrecord.co.uk*, 22 Jun; *businessinsider.com*, 29 Jun 2023.

## POISONED SCHOOLGIRLS [FT430:6-7]



Following the spate of schoolgirl 'poisonings' in Iran, two schools in northern Afghanistan, which borders on Iran, have reported similar incidents. Mohammad Rahmani, head of the provincial education department, reported that the 'attacks' took place at two primary schools in Sar-e-Pul province over Saturday 3 and Sunday 4 of June. 60 students were reported as being poisoned in Naswan-e-Kabod Aab school and 17 others in Naswan-e-Faizabad school. Rahmani said: "Both primary schools are near to each other and were targeted one after the other. We shifted the students to hospital and now they are all fine." He did not describe the symptoms the girls experienced or what poison had been used, but the pattern of the incidents is closely reminiscent of those in Iran. There, despite intensive



investigation, it has not been possible to identify the poison allegedly used or come up with any suspects who might be responsible and the incidents bear all the hallmarks of a social panic. In this case, Rahmani said that the poisonings had been orchestrated by someone with a personal grudge who paid a third party to carry out the attacks, although he did not name the individuals involved or elaborate further on how he knew this, nor whether any arrests had been made. In Afghanistan, since the Taliban returned to government, the rights of women and girls have been severely curtailed. They are banned from education beyond the sixth grade and are barred from most jobs and forbidden to enter many public spaces, which creates an environment in which the stresses that can produce a social panic are even more prevalent than in Iran. *theguardian.com*, 5 Jun 2023.

#### SOMERSET GIMP [FT428:26, 433:9]



For several years, someone in a gimp suit spread terror in and around the villages of Claverham and

Yatton in north Somerset, scaring people with his rubber suit and bizarre behaviour. Joshua Hunt, 31, has now been charged in relation to several of these incidents. He is accused of two counts of affray and one count each of possession of a bladed article and committing an act of outraging public decency and was scheduled to appear before North Somerset Magistrates' Court on 18 July. *dailymail.co.uk*, 23 Jun 2023.

#### LOST CHILDREN [FT434:4-5]



The rescue of the Colombian children Lesly Mukutuy, 13, and her younger siblings Soleiny, Tien and

Christin after 40 days lost in the rainforest following a light aircraft crash that killed their mother, involved both

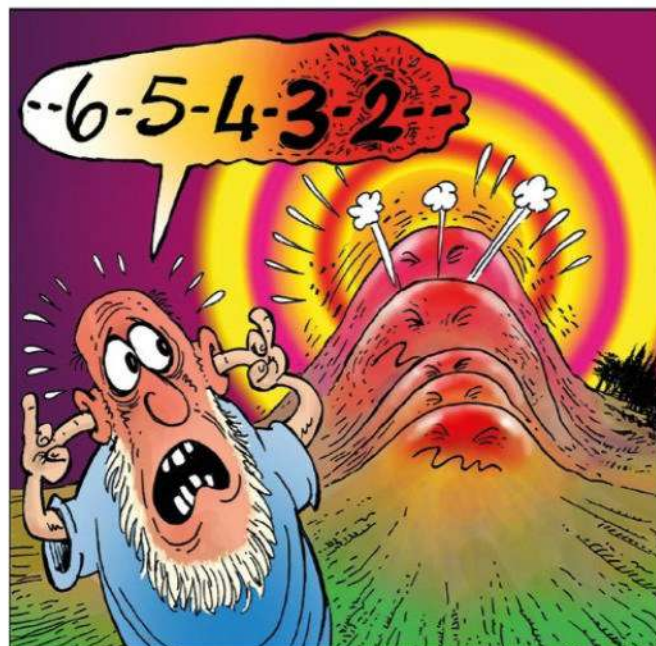
the Colombian military and 93 members of the Siona, Nasa, Huitoto, Sikuani, Misak, Murui and Koreguaje peoples. "It was the combination of our indigenous knowledge with Western knowhow, that's how we got this result," said Luis Acosta, head of Colombia's Indigenous Guard. "If it weren't for our ancestral understanding of the forest – its medicinal properties, its life and its spirits – we would not have found the kids when we did." His team of searchers prayed to the spirits of the jungle to guard the children and protect and guide the search parties. "Some did not eat animals for 40 days as an offering to the forest. Not even a snake, until the kids appeared," says Flavio Yepes, a searcher from the Sikuani community. "At night the tigers called out, which kept us alert during the search. Many of us had dreams which helped guide them towards the children," said Acosta. He also said that members of the team took hallucinogenic yagé, to open their minds and give them spiritual insight to help them locate the children. Yepes said that the crucial moment in the search came when members of the Murui people performed a yagé ceremony. "Some people become anacondas during these ceremonies, some tigers, others large birds. I don't know what animals the Murui transformed into that night, but it is what brought them to circle back towards the crash site, where they found the kids."

"We realised that with just human work it was impossible to find them, so we decided to turn to spiritual work. We took yagé because the search had become really hard," said Henry Guerrero, another member of the search party. "Sometimes even the greatest technology is not enough: ancestral knowledge has a role to play too," Acosta said, adding, "I hope the whole world has seen the power of our knowledge and our customs now. Mother Earth sent a message in protecting the children: that we must protect Mother Earth." *theguardian.com*, 16 Jun 2023

# MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

## 271: SHE'S ABOUT TO BLOW!



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

### The myth

Around the world there are a number of volcanoes which are overdue for eruption.

### The "truth"

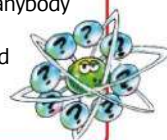
If you want to wind up a volcanologist, show her one of those "overdue volcano" lists on the Internet or in the press – the ones that warn tourists about which mountains should have overflowed recently, and are therefore sure to do so in the near future. There is simply, unequivocally, no such thing as an overdue volcano, say the Ologists of Volcan. Volcanoes do not operate according to timetables, not even (and this is the key point) slightly. The many factors which go towards causing an eruption, and their constant variations, make volcanic eruptions "inherently unpredictable". Imminence of eruption can be forecast to some extent in the short term by the monitoring of warning signs, but intervals can't. Even if patterns did exist, the paucity of data points would render them invisible to us. Incidentally, volcanoes do not smoke. At all. That stuff that looks like smoke is, as one expert put it, "a giant cloud of glass shards".

### Sources

[www.forbes.com/sites/robinandrews/2019/03/25/volcanoes-are-never-overdue-for-an-eruption-heres-why/?sh=15ca289133a5](http://www.forbes.com/sites/robinandrews/2019/03/25/volcanoes-are-never-overdue-for-an-eruption-heres-why/?sh=15ca289133a5); [www.usgs.gov/faqs/yellowstone-overdue-eruption-when-will-yellowstone-erupt](http://www.usgs.gov/faqs/yellowstone-overdue-eruption-when-will-yellowstone-erupt); [www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/five-myths/five-myths-about-volcanoes/2018/05/23/9d18fea6-5e07-11e8-9ee3-49d6d4814c4c\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/five-myths/five-myths-about-volcanoes/2018/05/23/9d18fea6-5e07-11e8-9ee3-49d6d4814c4c_story.html)

### Mythchaser

The single best-known fact about quantum physics is that nobody understands it, including the experts. But recently, some public-facing quantum physicists have argued that this view is outdated: that quantum is now a fully theorised and thoroughly predictable area of science, which poses no conceptual problems. Can anybody tell us whether this building block of 20th century common knowledge, the unknowability of Q, has indeed been rendered mythical – and do so in a way that won't hurt our brains too much?



# NECROLOG

This month we bid farewell to the black-bobbed queen of popular astrology and mark the premature passing of a Bigfoot witness turned researcher

## MYSTIC MEG

As a celebrity astrologer, Mystic Meg, who has died aged 80, achieved an unparalleled level of fame which only Russell Grant came close to matching. Mystic Meg's fame peaked in the 1990s when she appeared as resident soothsayer on the televised National Lottery Saturday night draw, dramatically lit and emerging from a swirl of smoke, to make predictions about the week's winner. Such was her fame at the time that a popular riposte to being asked a difficult question was "Who do you think I am, Mystic Meg?" *Sun* editor Victoria Newton, said: "When all the Spice Girls came to the office... all they wanted to do was meet Mystic Meg! You know you're a true icon when the only person Victoria Beckham is interested in is you."

Born Margaret Anne Lake in Accrington, Lancashire, under the sign of Leo, to a family of Romany descent, Meg was taught astrology by her Russian gypsy grandmother whose crystal ball she inherited and used throughout her career. Astrology, however, was not her original vocation; after studying English at the University of Leeds and gaining a teaching certificate, she became a sub-editor at the *News of the World*, eventually working her way up to being the deputy editor of the paper's weekend colour supplement. She combined her newspaper experience with her astrology skills by taking over the paper's horoscope column in the 1980s, under the name Meg Markova, before rebranding as Mystic Meg. She eventually provided astrology columns to the *Sun* as well and continued as a newspaper astrologer until 2015. To make her predictions, she worked with runes, crystal balls, I Ching, Tarot and numerology.

As Mystic Meg, she initially achieved national recognition



LEFT: Mystic Meg, walking like an Egyptian.

in 1989 when she was the first to offer phone-line horoscope readings. This quickly became the most popular phone-in service on BT and made Meg the most successful phone-line astrologer in the world, which led to her joining the lottery show at its 1994 launch. With her distinctive black bob and cloak, her image was instantly recognisable, and she went on to build on this with multiple brand deals and appearances in commercials over the years. This enabled her to invest in her passion for racing, owning at least three racehorses, and to live comfortably in a three-bedroom flat in Notting Hill, which she shared with seven cats. Despite a horoscope cast for her at age seven that predicted she would marry a wealthy man, she remained single throughout her life, although the love of her life was Nigel Moores, heir to the Littlewoods football pools empire and worth £9million when he was killed in a car

crash in the south of France in 1977, aged 39. Meg wrote several books including *Mystic Meg's Astrolife* and *Mystic Meg's Lucky Numbers for Love Life and The Lottery*, and in 2015 set up a website featuring horoscopes, personalised readings, and, going back to her roots, a live telephone hotline hosted by psychics. On her death, Uri Geller said Meg was "so identifiable by name and image... the quintessential fortune teller who brought mystery and mystique to millions of believers."

*Mystic Meg (Margaret Anne Lake), media astrologer; born, Accrington, Lancashire, 27 July 1942; died, Paddington, London, 9 Mar 2023, aged 80.*

## CLAUDIA ACKLEY

Following an incident on 17 March 2017 in which she and her two daughters, then aged 14 and 11, encountered and filmed what she believed to be an alpha male Sasquatch in the California woodlands near

Lake Arrowhead in the San Bernardino National Forest, Claudia Ackley achieved international fame when she sued the California Park Service for dismissing her sighting as "a bear". "I swear to God, on my life, we ran into a Sasquatch," she said. "My daughters have seen bears. They're not scared by bears." She said the creature, which she describes as leering at her while sitting in the branches of a tree about 30 feet (9m) off the ground, had a huge head and ears, with black almond-shaped eyes. "He looked like a Neanderthal man with hair all over him. He had solid black eyes. He had no expression on his face at all. He did not show his teeth. He just stared at the three of us," she said, describing their encounter. Her younger daughter later said that she had seen two other similar creatures on the ground, which ran away at their approach. Returning to the location later, she found a giant 22-inch (56cm) footprint and another 13-inch (33cm) footprint near the site, both showing all five toes.

Ackley's partner, Ed Brown, said: "Her lawsuit's goal was to force the state of California and the fish and wildlife authority to take sightings seriously and investigate them properly, rather than just say, 'It was a bear'. The goal was to get them to do real investigation and research." However, Ackley's lawsuit was dismissed by the court after a month, with support from leading US 'Skeptic' Michael Shermer, who said: "You can't sue the state of California to protect a species if you can't prove the species exists, that applies to everything from a snail to Bigfoot... No. You have to have a body." However, Brown said: "Right up until the very end, she believed in



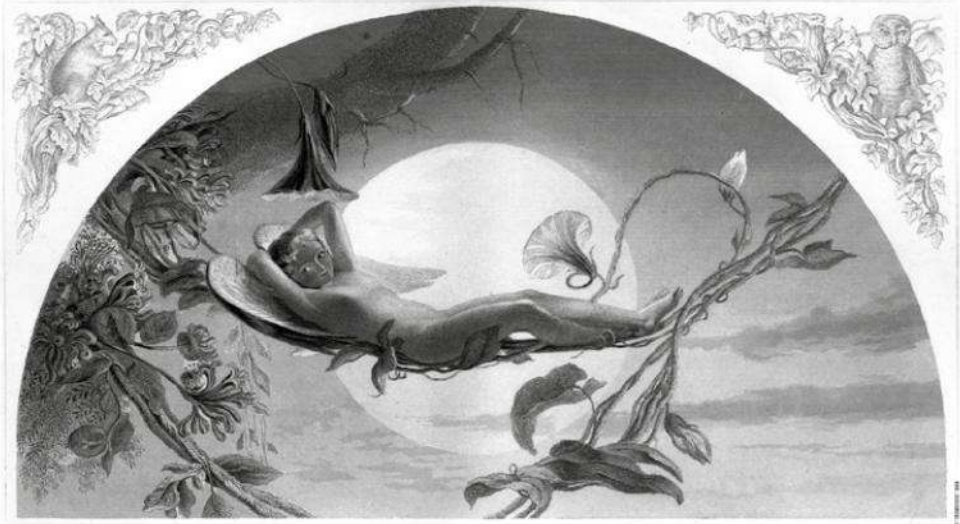


what she saw, and she wanted to help other people who had experienced something similar.”

The California incident was not the first time Ackley believed she had come face-to-face with a Sasquatch; her first encounter was in 1997. While camping with friends in Yosemite National Park, she heard a growl outside her tent and when she looked out saw a bipedal, hairy creature walking away. From then on Ackley took an active interest in Bigfoot research, but her pivotal encounter came in 2014. She was walking in Washington State with her then-husband and claimed to have seen a small, 5ft- (1.5m) tall Bigfoot in the trees and locked eyes with it. “I realised at that point, looking at the creature, that there’s so much of life that we don’t know. Life is so beautiful, and I’m wasting my years,” she said. “I lost 125 pounds and decided to get a divorce... It motivated me to chase my dreams and live my life.” From then on, she completely dedicated her life to proving the existence of Bigfoot, investigating thousands of sightings, playing voice recordings in forests in an attempt to teach Bigfoot human speech and setting up a PTSD group for survivors of Bigfoot sightings. “No matter what you believe, she collected everything she could to go forward with this and come Hell or high water she was out to prove they existed,” Brown said.

Ackley’s unexpected death at 51 is believed to have been the result of a heart attack. While away on a business trip, Brown grew concerned when he was unable to contact her, so called emergency services for a welfare check, and they found her lifeless in a chair at their home. “The community – regardless of anyone’s views – has lost someone who was willing to stand up and fight for their beliefs. The Bigfoot community lost a soldier,” said Brown.

*Claudia Ackley, Bigfoot witness and researcher; born, California, 10 Oct 1971; died, Tennessee, 3 July 2023, aged 51.*



## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

### FAIRY CENSUS 2

Dear reader, I write both to whine and to appeal. First the whine. My eyes are gummed up with fairy dust, I’m almost deaf from the beating of fey wings and my typing fingers have been elf-struck. How did I get myself in this state? Over the last three days I’ve spent some 40 hours getting the second *Fairy Census* ready for publication, dodging between a database, a Word document and a wretched, wretched Excel sheet.

Long-time forteans will remember that the *Fairy Census 1* (published in 2017; see FT362:30-37) included 500 fairy encounters gathered in from around the world, with detailed rubrics about age, place, chronology, the emotional state of witnesses and much, much more. *Fairy Census 2* will offer more of the same. Highlights include a human-sized cat in Germany, an elven cloud in Glasgow and – there is no easy way to say this – a tiny woman on a roller coaster ride in Florida. (“She had,” apparently, “red hair, covering her eyes.”) And the appeal? I have run, dear reader, out of contributions. In fact, I stand at 470, 30 shy of the finish line at 500. With *Fairy Census 1* the most generous contributors were from *Fortean Times* (with New Zealand National Radio in second place). I’m hoping, then, that *FT* readers can do it again. If you have had a fairy experience, or think that you might have had a fairy

experience, we would be very grateful for any contributions. The address is [www.fairyist.com/survey/](http://www.fairyist.com/survey/) or, alternatively, just type ‘Fairy Census’ into Google.

What is a ‘fairy’, you ask? What, indeed, is an ‘experience’? Different respondents have very different ideas, as ‘giant cat’, ‘elven cloud’ and the red-head on the roller

coaster will have shown.

The *Fairy Census* is an equal-opportunities survey and all types of the weird and impossible (with or without wings) are welcome. If you are among the first 30 and give permission on the survey then you’ll slip into *Fairy Census 2*. Everything, it should go without saying, is strictly anonymous. If not, you’ll be the first in *Fairy Census 3* in a few years. We are playing the long game here. The aim is to reach, by 2040, some 2,000 entries (we are presently closing in on 1,000).

There is no danger, then, of anyone being left out. It is hoped that the completed *Fairy Census* will be one of the biggest – if not the biggest – collections of collated supernatural experiences freely available online. It is hoped, too, that covering 20 to 30 years of fairy history we will be able to observe changes in supernatural lore as they happen.

Simon Young is the author of *Nail in the Skull and Other Victorian Urban Legends* (Mississippi University Press, 2023), the Brian McConnell Book Award winner for 2023.

HIGHLIGHTS  
INCLUDE A  
HUMAN-SIZED  
CAT IN GERMANY  
AND AN ELVEN  
CLOUD IN  
GLASGOW



## “Stay out of dark alleys...”

**NIGEL WATSON** looks over his shoulder and hopes the Men in Black aren't following him...

### SHADOWLANDS

As a ufologist, you know you are getting near the truth when you receive threats that you should stop your research. This has its roots early in the history of ufology when Albert K Bender suddenly closed down his grandly named International Flying Saucer Bureau and suspended publishing its quarterly newsletter *Space Review* in 1953. A few years later he explained that three Men in Black had stopped him publishing the truth about UFOs (see **FT341:24**). Bender's original MIB are sinister extraterrestrial silencers who telepathically told him to “Stop Publishing”. Some ufologists, like John Keel, have portrayed them as being weird-acting androids, ETs or people possessed (see this month's *Strange Statesmen*, p.48, for more), whereas others regard them as flesh and blood Government agents trained to stop the truth becoming public.

### STRINGFIELD'S SQUIRRELS

Rather than suppressing the truth, there are plenty of shadowy figures, usually anonymous, who are equally willing to spill the beans about UFOs. In the late 1970s, ufologist Leonard Stringfield began collecting accounts of secret military operations involving the retrieval of crashed saucers and alien bodies.

In *UFOs 1947-1987* (Fortean Times, 1987), Stringfield does acknowledge that many sources were of the friend-of-a-friend variety, but an anonymous deep-throat informant in the CIA whom he called ‘Mr Q’ seemed to have had a personal involvement in such retrievals and had an accurate knowledge of worldwide cases. Through tape recordings Mr Q's “terse, commanding and knowledgeable” voice warned that some of this information would put Stringfield in danger and that he should “stay out of dark alleys”.

Mr Q was not wrong: after giving a lecture on anecdotal case histories at a UFO conference in Dayton, Ohio, in July 1978, Stringfield was quickly whisked away by plain clothes police. It was explained that someone had threatened to kill him if he gave his presentation, and whether it was a prank or something more sinister the officers had to protect him. There followed further threats by phone and mail, and he noticed a stranger lurking outside his home. Unfazed, in 1980 Stringfield wrote a second Status Report on the information supplied to him; then, all his sources dried up, including Mr Q and a medical doctor who said he conducted an alien autopsy in the early 1950s.



Although Stringfield felt that pressure was being exerted to suppress these stories, someone called Mack then appeared offering him a set of photographs of alien cadavers, purportedly from the CIA's own files. Mack wanted Stringfield to present the photos publicly, but before he did so Stringfield discovered they were fakes, and would have severely undermined his credibility. Was this part of a CIA plot or was someone just pulling his leg?

### DETECTIVE DODD

Like Stringfield, British UFO detective Tony Dodd describes in his book *Alien Investigator* (Headline, 1999) how he was promised some astounding photographs by a diplomat in 1997. Photographs of a reptilian alien, grey aliens on a US warship and a UFO with greys on a USAF base were shown to a friend of Dodd's by the anonymous diplomat. He said he had personally attended meetings with the aliens and that they wanted to meet Dodd in America. Annoyed that the American ‘big boys’ would not allow such a meeting, the diplomat decided to give Dodd copies of the photographs as well as a video of UFOs landing on a USAF base. As Dodd lived in Yorkshire, his friend agreed to collect the package from the diplomat in Hampstead, London.

The exchange was watched by four figures in a blue Rover who set off in hot pursuit of the friend's Ford Escort. Dodd describes the following chase as like something out of a spy thriller. His friend, knowing he could not deliver the package directly to Dodd in Yorkshire, managed to post it before the Rover caught up with him. After all that excitement, the package never reached Dodd's home.

The diplomat was recalled to his own country, and Dodd never got to meet the

**LEFT:** Pioneering ufologist Albert K Bender and MIB.

aliens. Their plans were thwarted because as Dodd puts it they got “too close to the enormity of the truth...” Either that or his friend was telling porkies.

Stringfield and Dodd would be delighted to know that nowadays whistle-blowers no longer want to be hidden away and are all too happy to make their claims public.

### BIOLOGICAL BAMBOOZLE

Bucking that trend is an anonymous molecular biologist who claims in a July 2023 Reddit posting to have worked for a national security contractor in a laboratory at Fort Detrick, Maryland, with a team of 20 scientists on an Exo-Biospheric-Organisms (EBO) programme. Documents relating to their biology and to a lesser extent their food, religion and culture were available to study, but there was nothing about their technology. The research found that the aliens had a combination of genomes from our own and an unknown biosphere, leading the team to conclude that: “They are artificial, ephemeral and disposable organisms created for a purpose that still partially eludes us.”

EBOs look like the grey aliens reported in the UFO literature. They are about 150cm (5ft) tall, have four long fingers and have eyes three times larger than human eyes, covered by a semi-transparent biosynthetic film. They have no teeth or tongue, so they can only consume liquid foods, and having no anus or genitals their waste products are vectored out through the pores of their skin, which gives off the odour of ammonia. Their brains feature nodular structures containing intricate biological circuitry that indicate they interact and perhaps are controlled by their technology, so they are more like worker ants than individual entities.

A red flag is that several months ago a Reddit post discussed ammonia in relation to the alien creatures seen in Varginha, Brazil (**FT432:30**), and much of the grey-like alien description neatly fits in with UFO lore.

What makes this story stand out is that it discusses and uses complex genetic terminology and concepts, but it is very probable that someone with this knowledge has used it to bamboozle us yet again, in the same manner as Mr Q or the ‘diplomat’.

[www.reddit.com/r/aliens/comments/14rp7w9/from\\_the\\_late\\_2000s\\_to\\_the\\_mid2010s\\_i\\_worked\\_as\\_a/](https://www.reddit.com/r/aliens/comments/14rp7w9/from_the_late_2000s_to_the_mid2010s_i_worked_as_a/); [www.reddit.com/r/aliens/comments/yhenze/why\\_do\\_you\\_think\\_those\\_ets\\_that\\_crashed\\_in/](https://www.reddit.com/r/aliens/comments/yhenze/why_do_you_think_those_ets_that_crashed_in/)





## UFO showtime

JENNY RANGLES enjoys a summer of UFO sightings – but we can't always be sure what we're seeing

Summertime and the living is easy, as the song goes. And summer is also the prime time for UFO spotting. People tend to be outside enjoying the day and more likely to be looking up at clear skies than usual. Being on holiday, or just having a break, also means they probably have a camera or mobile phone to hand, so it's no surprise to find that the summer months are when UFOs put on a show and people are able to capture evidence of their presence.

This year is proving no exception to that trend. Indeed, over the weekend of 2-4 June in and around the Lancashire city of Preston many people witnessed aerial displays that they then reported excitedly online. A few seconds of video revealed an unusually shaped object drifting in the sky from Leyland and moving north. Of course, speculation on what the video showed was rife, so I talked to my colleague Kate Preston, a local researcher who has lived in the area for years, who initially suggested it was simply a nearly full Moon. Many people, surprisingly, do not know that you can see the Moon in daytime against a blue sky. This was a good theory, given the weather conditions, but in this case, it was not the answer: checks revealed the Moon was not visible at the time of the key observations.

One account said the object was viewed twice, heading from Leyland towards Preston. There were suggestions of a weather balloon, but the Met office said none was present. One witness said: "It moved quite fast. I saw it on two different days." This suggests an aircraft, though the object on the video does not look like one, so I investigated the air traffic recorded on radar across that whole weekend, focusing on the times when witnesses saw the UFO. In tracking traffic on those days, I noticed a great number of light aircraft from both Blackpool and Barton airfields, with private owners enjoying the fine weather. But these are extremely common, as I recall from living near both these airfields in the past, and locals would be used to such things overhead. There were airliners passing when the sightings were made, but at 36,000ft (11,000m) and again seem very unlikely candidates. I did notice what seemed to be an irregular corridor for emergency flights, such as air ambulances passing to the west of the sighting area, and sometimes the helicopters involved were circling or hovering. At a distance on a sunny day with no sound being audible, this might offer a possible solution; but nothing matched the accounts.

### The summer is when UFOs put on a show and people capture evidence

There was one interesting and unusual flight that caught my eye: an RAF jet fighter that had only left British Aerospace at Warton, northwest of Preston, after commission in September 2022. Registered ZB 138, it's one of the RAF's modern planes. On Friday 2 June at 3.25pm – as the sightings began – this jet flew right over the area at about 7,000ft (2,130m) and headed to the coast, where it circled over Southport and the Wirral. It was over the Mersey at just a few hundred feet and seems to have done a touch-and-go over the runway at Liverpool airport under 200ft (60m) before heading back up north and passing over the area south of Preston again at 8,000ft (2,440m) at 3.45pm. Whether this unusual event is connected with any of the UFO sightings is hard to say, but is worth noting as some witnesses reported "RAF jets", believing that these were perhaps responding to the UFO. But given that jets frequently fly low over the area, this was probably just coincidence.

However, the BAE airbase at Warton has other secrets. It has long been a location where new technology has been tested. When I lived locally in the 1990s I saw some high-tech things and heard plenty of witnesses thinking even stranger tech was visible in the skies above the Fylde coast and might be connected with UFO sightings. Warton also has connections with the development of drones, not unlike the little ones people use to take overhead photos, but far more sophisticated and much larger. Small aircraft have been developed and tested at Warton, though for obvious reasons details are scarce. Taranis, named after the Celtic god of thunder, is a V-shaped drone that can fly on its own or be piloted and has extreme capabilities. It was tested at Warton by BAE for almost a decade, while largely kept secret. There are projects like this all over the world, and often by the time we get to see them they are already being replaced by something newer and still secret. Indeed, there is information about another BAE aircraft which can use its four

BELOW: The Leyland UFO on Sunday 4 June 2023.

rotor engines to hover over water and deploy torpedoes; but the fact we even know this much about it suggests something far more secret is now underway.

I think the most likely explanation for at least some of the key sightings that weekend could be a paraglider attracted by the warm weather and good thermals over the weekend: the shape in the photo could easily be an unfocused image of such a thing. When I lived on the North Wales coast I would see them soaring over the beaches and sea, having launched from the hills behind me. The first time I was baffled, but in summer they became a regular sight and I would just look up and smile. I wouldn't be surprised if some aeronaut is also quietly smiling at the excitement they accidentally triggered.

There were mysteries elsewhere that weekend. Another UFO sighting occurred on Saturday 3 June as the Red Arrows display team roared over the Torbay area of Devon. Emma Smith reported seeing a black dot-like object near the jets and another witness filmed it. Even stranger, he had seen the Red Arrows plus mysterious black dot before. Using a Nikon P900 camera on burst mode, he estimated the object over Torbay was travelling at 1,000mph (1,600km/h) as it flew "dangerously close" to the aircraft.

All of which is interesting because several people watching the Red Arrows during the Coronation celebrations in London a month earlier had noticed a similar thing (FT433:7); I was watching on TV and saw it too. I assumed it was a drone flying nearby and recording the aircraft for training purposes, but soon reconsidered, as this would be dangerous with fast-moving aircraft and people below. I then thought it was probably a bird, lower and nearer the camera than the jets, with misperception making it seem close to the planes. I'd assumed the 'UFO' was farther away, and larger and faster, by misjudging its proximity to the aircraft. I'd imagine lots of birds are near cameras filming the Red Arrows and the noise from the aircraft disturbs them and they fly off: we then just connect two things that are separate and assume they are co-located.

This theory might be wrong, but it seems more likely to explain what I saw than tiny plane spotters from outer space.



# MARGARET MURRAY

## THE GRANDMOTHER OF WICCA

From pioneering studies in Egyptology to fighting her corner as a feminist academic, Margaret Murray was a true trailblazer. Her folklore-driven studies of witchcraft created an image that has stuck to this day – and she even found time to be an occult advisor on 1957's *Night of the Demon*. **BRIAN J ROBB** explores the life and times of the woman behind the still controversial 'witch-cult' theory.

In an era when the rubric is (rightly) that women are capable of anything, the evidence shows that it has always been the case. Take Margaret Murray, for example. She had advantages, certainly, being born into the wealthy middle-class during the 19th century British Empire's domination of India, but she carved her own way through several careers and disciplines, taking in archaeology (with a special focus on Egypt), history, folklore, and anthropology. She made her mark across these fields, while her investigations into folklore gave birth to her 'witch-cult' theory in religion and literature, which led to her being dubbed the 'Grandmother of Wicca'. She was even an advisor on the 1957 British occult movie *Night of the Demon*, starring Dana Andrews and Peggy Cummins. Murray continued to investigate and write about her obsessions right up to her death in 1963 at the grand old age of 100.

### DIGGING THE PAST

Margaret Murray was a woman both of and beyond her own time. Born in July 1863, she grew up in a world of privilege in Calcutta, then part of 'British India'. Her father, James, had also been born in India and was of English descent, while her mother, also Margaret, was a Christian missionary who'd come to the country in 1857. Young Margaret joined an older sister, Mary, in completing the Murray clan, which resided in the European sector of Calcutta with her paternal grandmother and great grandmother and 10 Indian household servants. Her businessman father managed a local paper mill and repeatedly held the post of President of the Calcutta Chamber of Commerce.

Although she enjoyed wealth and privilege, Murray was never formally educated during her Indian childhood, a strange omission for a class of people who



LEFT: Margaret Murray in 1928.

– that of the necessarily inferior status of women in society. While Murray would ultimately reject both Christianity and her uncle's position on women, she was grateful to him for introducing her to archaeology through trips to see some of the country's most prominent historical monuments.

Murray's adolescence was a peripatetic period, taking in several years in Bonn, Germany (where she became fluent in German), then another couple of years back in Calcutta, finally settling for a while back in south London in 1877, when she was 14. Her discovery of the Crystal Palace dinosaurs – anatomically and historically inaccurate models installed in 1854 – helped further develop her interest in archaeology and the exploration of the past. By 1880, the Murray family had moved once more back to Calcutta, where Margaret remained for the next seven years, training and working as a

nurse at Calcutta General Hospital. Back in England in 1887, she took up an early form of social work helping the 'underprivileged'.

Despite her lack of formal education, it was apparent that Margaret Murray was a smart cookie. Before the end of the century, she had enrolled at the newly opened Egyptology department at University College London (UCL), taking up her studies at the age of 30 in 1894. Modern British Egyptology had taken off in the middle of the 1800s thanks to the pioneering work of Sir William Flinders Petrie, who was 10 years Murray's senior. By 1880, Petrie had established the concepts of controlled and scientifically recorded on-site excavations, thus codifying the emerging field of professional and academic archaeology. When Murray enrolled, the UCL Egyptology department was run by Petrie, and she quickly attached herself to

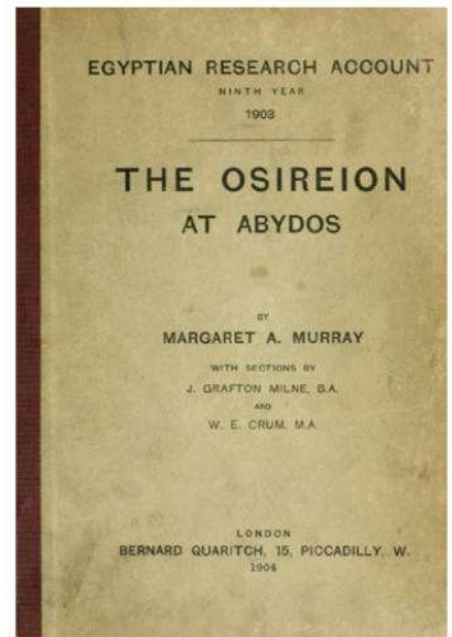
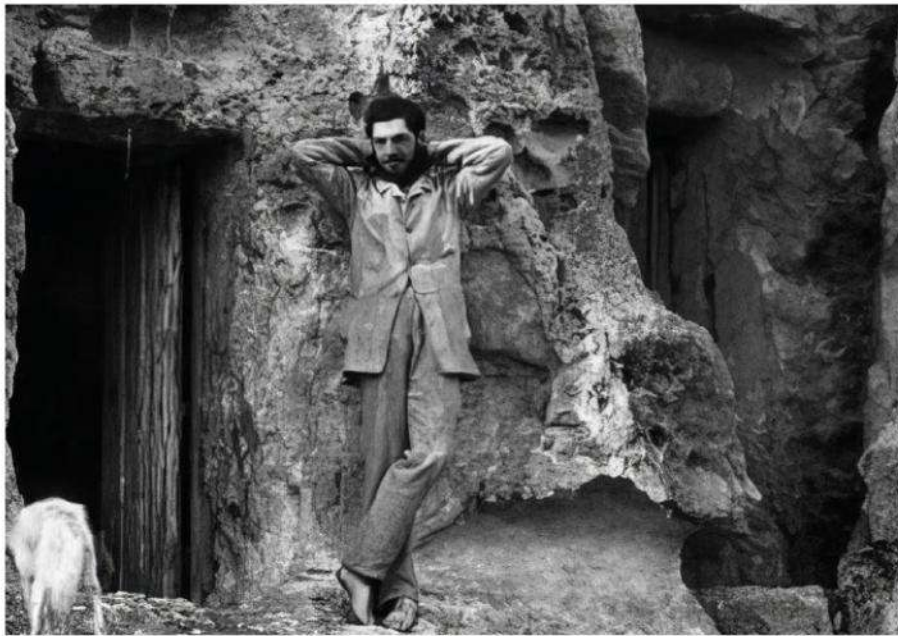
### MURRAY'S INVESTIGATIONS INTO FOLKLORE GAVE BIRTH TO HER 'WITCH-CULT' THEORY

often made a virtue of learning. At the age of seven, in 1870, Margaret was sent with her sister back to Britain, there to live with their Uncle John, a vicar who provided the Murray girls with a strong Christian education. John Murray went to great pains to impose another of his beliefs on his brother's children









**ABOVE LEFT:** Flinders Petrie in Egypt in 1881. **BELOW:** Archaeological excavations at Abydos in 1902, where Murray discovered the Osireion. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Murray's account of the 1903 dig, published in 1904.

him, recognising there was much he could teach her. She became his de facto assistant, helping prepare the reports of his various excavations. Petrie helped Murray secure publication of her first research paper, and she quickly became indispensable to the department, often helping to teach the languages she'd only just been learning herself a short while before. By 1898, Murray had become the first fully-fledged female lecturer in archaeology in Britain, teaching in the department of Egyptology. Other courses were added to her teaching portfolio, taking in ancient Egyptian history and other related subjects. Additionally, she took on the teaching of evening classes in Egyptology at the British Museum.

Recognising her lack of experience in field archaeology, Murray was pleased to be invited to join Petrie's excavation at Abydos

## SHE MADE SIGNIFICANT DISCOVERIES AT ABYDOS, INCLUDING UNCOVERING AN OSIRIAN TEMPLE

during the 1902-03 season. Petrie had been working at the site since the turn of the century, so he taught Murray his excavation techniques and then appointed her to a senior position at the dig. This annoyed some of her male colleagues, who were none too happy about having their work directed

by a woman, and an unmarried one at that. Although she'd been making her way in academia well enough, this was not the first time Murray had run up against such sexism, and it recalled the teachings of her Uncle John during her youth. The reaction of her male colleagues at Abydos was just one more spur to Murray's investigation and eventual adoption of early feminist views.

Murray made significant discoveries at Abydos, including uncovering an Osirian temple, and she returned for the following 1903-04 season to excavate a major cemetery near Cairo. Much of her work involved the transcription and translation of inscriptions, rather than actual digging. British Egyptology boomed in the following years, arguably climaxing with Howard Carter's uncovering the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922, creating a wider popular understanding of the field and the academic discipline (although the Mummy craze helped; see FT386:28-36). For most people, those achievements would have been enough, but for Margaret Murray it was just the beginning.

### FEMINIST CAMPAIGNER

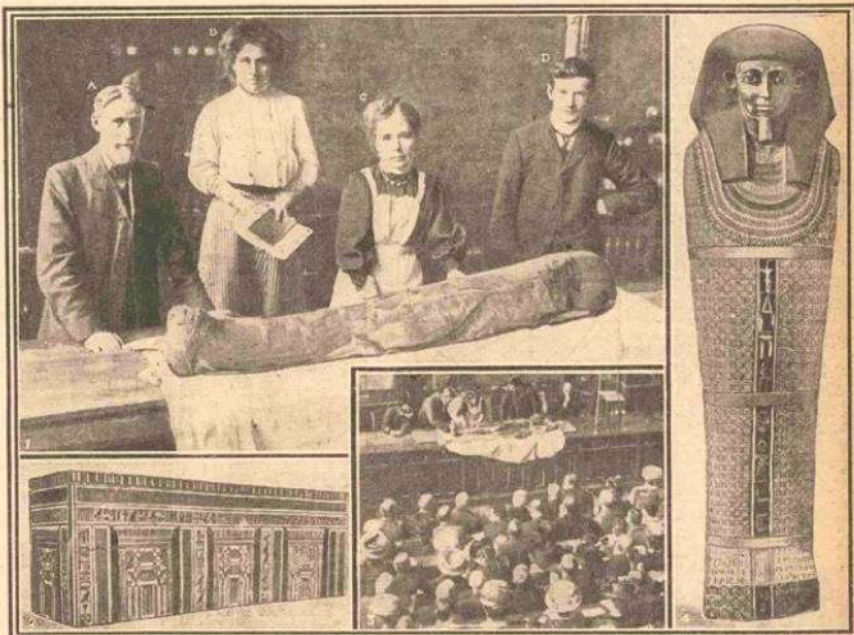
It might be over the top to claim that Margaret Murray became radicalised by her experiences in Egypt, but it certainly raised her consciousness in terms of feminism, allowing a nascent viewpoint that had always been dormant within her to burst forth. Back in London, she not only pursued her academic career but began to actively involve herself in the growing feminist movement. Women were already able to vote and stand for office in former British colonies like Australia and New Zealand long before they were allowed to do so in the UK. Murray joined Emmeline Pankhurst's Women's Social and Political



COLIN WATERS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



EGYPTIAN PRINCE'S BODY REMOVED FROM ITS WRAPPINGS.



was not carried out with such skill as it was a century or so later. (1) The operators about to start work—(A) Mr. R. Standen, (B) Miss H. Davis, (C) Miss Murray, (D) Mr. J. Wilfred Jackson. (2) The coffin in which the body was enclosed. (3) A general view of the proceedings. (4) The painted mummy-case, or inner coffin.—(Daily Mirror photographs.)

The start of the Great War in 1914 prevented Murray and Petrie from continuing their excavations, so Murray turned her curiosity to sites and artefacts

Her growing feminism and interest in studying folklore came together in her work on witches and witchcraft. It was only after turning 50 that Murray fully dedicated herself to working on what would develop into her book *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921). The witch trials of early European history were her new fascination, captured in her first paper on the subject which she published in 1917 in *Folklore*, the journal of the Folklore Society. She developed a theory that witches were, in fact, part of “a definite religion, with beliefs and rituals, and organisation as highly developed as that of any cult...” This was at a time when there was little serious work on witches and witchcraft and they were still thought of as figures of fun or of dark foreboding, as in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. Murray went on to provide the entry for Witchcraft in the 1929 edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* in which she focused on her own witch-cult theory to the exclusion of other viewpoints. Nonetheless,





## MARGARET MURRAY'S GRAIL ROMANCE

Murray's interest in folklore was sparked when she went to stay with her Uncle John during her childhood. Murray claimed that during this period she became "conversant with the 'heathen' antiquities and the legends of the neighbourhood." That neighbourhood was the village of Lambourn, close to the Seven Barrows – part of a Bronze Age cemetery – and the Uffington White Horse.

While recuperating in Glastonbury four decades later, Murray became entranced by the sixth century prophecy of Melkin the Bard. This claimed that Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus Christ, had brought the sought-after Holy Grail to Glastonbury, hiding it within the Abbey along with "two white and silver vessels filled with the blood and sweat of the prophet Jesus". In the mid-18th century, John of Glastonbury declared the Melkin Prophecy to be fake news.

Murray was nonetheless fascinated by Melkin's work and wanted to trace its origin. She read widely about the legends of Arthur and corresponded from her sickbed with a variety of experts – including Sir John Rhys, author of *Studies in the Arthurian Legend* (1891), who she contacted just prior to his death, aged 75, in 1915 – although she was more often than not asking esoteric questions few could answer. Through her resulting paper, "Egyptian Elements in the Grail Romance", Murray set out to prove a previously unsuspected Egyptian origin for some of Melkin's tales. She cited names of places and people as evidence and highlighted other "details which show an Egyptian origin".



ABOVE: Joseph of Arimathea in Glastonbury, as depicted in a stained glass window.



ABOVE: Founder of modern Wicca Gerald Gardner was heavily influenced by Murray's ideas about witchcraft. BELOW: The first edition of Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, published in 1921.

her entry remained until 1969 and proved hugely influential in the field of study. Her bestowal of agency upon the oft-neglected witches of Europe was another example of her feminism in action.

It was at this point that things took a definite turn for the fortan in Margaret Murray's story. Her serious academic work in the field of folklore saw her taken up as a figurehead by the occultists of the 1920s such as Dion Fortune and Lewis Spence. Her idea of witches as forming an occult society fitted right in with their own views, so she was automatically adopted as one of them. She further developed her work in the 1933 book *The God of the Witches* in which she downplayed some of the more unpleasant aspects of witchcraft and instead redefined the movement under the rubric of "the old religion". This, too, caught on in occult circles, influencing a development of 'modern witchcraft' that slowly claimed the trappings of religion for itself under the name of 'Wicca'. Although it would take the better part of another two decades for this to come about, Murray was widely regarded as the 'grandmother' of the movement as she was one of the first to outline the ideas that neo-pagans later followed in establishing Wicca as a continuation of the 'old religion'.

Murray's work in the field of witchcraft left her open to contact by the "lunatic fringe", as her biographer Kathleen L Sheppard dubbed those who sent Murray "stories of

their own fairies, working spells, and their experiences with witches".

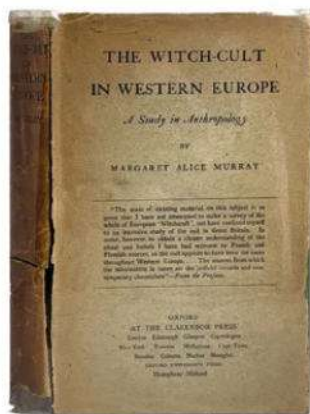
In embracing her study of folklore, Murray was endeavouring to move out of the shadow of Flinders Petrie; she was often regarded solely as his 'assistant' within Egyptology circles, despite her own achievements. Her ideas and her witch-cult theory also broke with what Sheppard called "the anthropological status quo", so this set her up as a potentially dangerous outsider in the field. Her feminist-driven studies of

the practices of witchcraft were seen as a threat to the scholarly Establishment, and part of the disdain shown towards her and her work were no doubt due to the simple fact that she was not a man. As Murray's ideas became more widely known and helped shaped the popular view of witches and witchcraft, there was dismay among the Establishment that they had lost control of their carefully regulated narrative. In moving away from Petrie and Egyptology, Murray had found herself

a perch on the outlying edge of folklore scholarship where her ideas were widely accepted by the public yet derided by her peers and critics among the scholarly community.

### WITCHES' VOICE

So, what exactly was Murray's witch-cult thesis? Apart from being widely regarded as the first truly feminist take on the subject of the historical witch trials, Murray's work was said to be the first to give voice to the actual







LEFT: Murray being interviewed by the BBC. BELOW: Murray's second book on the 'witch-cult', *The God of the Witches*, appeared in 1933.

witches themselves, as distinct from their persecutors, from whose point of view much of the previous history had been written. These were laudable aims, but Murray ultimately undermined her own work by cherry-picking material that supported her thesis and discarding much that didn't. Her Egyptology background didn't really help her to engage with European folklore, although in *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* Murray pointed out she was largely focusing her study on Britain. She outlined ideas about witches being part of an occult ancient religion of Western Europe, essentially a venerable secret society, part of a fertility-based faith that worshipped a Mother Goddess. She argued that witches operated in covens, small local-based groups of usually 13 members (an idea that apparently comes from a single source: the report of a Scottish witch trial), which initiated new members through occult ceremonies. She developed the idea of witches' sabbaths and outlined controversial practices that involved both group sex and blood sacrifice, before thinking better of it. This pagan religion had, according to Murray, survived the arrival of Christianity, although it went largely underground. Given this was an area little studied, Murray became an expert on witchcraft almost by default.

Gerald Gardner built upon Murray's hypothesis in his 1954 book *Witchcraft Today* (which boasted an introduction by Murray), further disseminating and popularising her take on the subject and forming the basis for the modern Wicca movement. So influential was Murray's hypothesis that it still forms the basis for the most popular conception of witches to this day, despite being superseded by later research.

Contemporary and later historians have taken issue with many of Murray's ideas, especially her belief in a surviving race of British dwarfs that gave rise to much of fairy folklore, and her idea that both Joan of Arc and Gilles de Rais were members of the witch-cult who were executed for their religious beliefs. As well as her reliance

on carefully selected and interpreted sources, Murray's research was criticised for arguing that the witch-driven cult was 'the old religion' of Britain. Her follow-up book, *The God of the Witches* (1931) pushed this angle strongly, and expanded the cult's presence to Asia and parts of Africa. She placed the Devil, or 'the Horned God', at the centre of her thesis, managing to make connections back to her Egyptology studies by bringing in Osiris and Amon. By the 1950s, Murray was connecting her own work to that of James George Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, first published in 1890. Despite such criticisms, it can be said that through Margaret Murray's endeavours – however flawed – witches were given their own voice and put at the centre of their own story for the first time.

Several writers have made claims that Margaret Murray was herself a practising witch who put her theoretical research to use in the real world. She is said to have cast spells and become a practitioner of magic. In particular, it is said that Murray employed curses against those who she believed deserved it. When academic Jaroslav Cerny was promoted to the position of Professor of Egyptology over Murray's friend Walter Bryan Emery, she was said to have laid a curse on him.

This apparently involved mixing ingredients in a frying pan and casting a spell with two witnesses present. During World War I, Murray was said to have pre-empted Second World War magician Dion Fortune by taking on the enemy in a supernatural battle (see FT267:34-41). She was said to have created a wax model of Kaiser Wilhelm II and then melted it, presumably hoping her magic would have an effect on the real Kaiser, hundreds of miles away in Germany.

For most of the rest of the 1920s, Margaret Murray led archaeological excavations in Malta, digging up Bronze Age monuments. She couldn't resist the lure of investigating the local folklore, however, and produced *Maltese Folktales* (1932), translating local stories into English. In the early 1930s, she was working in the Malta Museum, cataloguing their Bronze Age materials. Her work in Malta led to an invitation to lead further archaeological work on Menorca. By now she was an Assistant Professor at UCL and had been awarded an Honorary Doctorate for her work in Egyptology,



## THE WITCH BOTTLE

In 1915, Margaret Murray was given what was described to her as "a witch in a bottle". A decade later she donated the object to the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, where it is now regarded as "one of the most famous artefacts in the English collections there", according to researcher Alison Petch. The museum's accession note on the item – apparently written by Murray herself – describes it as a "small glass flask of bilobed shape, silvered over the inside and stoppered. This is reputed to contain a witch, and the late owner, an old lady living in a village near Hove, Sussex, remarked, 'They do say there be a witch in it, and if you let un out there'll be a peck o' trouble'". It was obtained from her in 1915." The bottle has never been opened, so that "peck o' trouble" has never been defined.

Murray also donated what she claimed was "a witch's broom" to the Cambridge Museum of Anthropology; she apparently unearthed it while excavating near Cambridge in the mid-1930s. The 'broom' was rediscovered by museum staff in 2009 and is now on display, despite it being only 30-35cm (12-14in) in length – far too short to be of use to any but the smallest of witches. Nonetheless, Murray held up her discovery as physical evidence to back up her witch-cult theories.

For more on witch bottles, see FT359:32-37.





# MARGARET MURRAY AT THE MOVIES

Amid all her other achievements, Margaret Murray managed to have a major impact on the way witchcraft and the occult were depicted in British supernatural movies. According to a press release issued on 18 October 1956: “Hollywood film actor Dana Andrews arrived in London today to make a film called *The Haunted* at Elstree.” The story was accompanied by a curious photo of Andrews smooching with a rather startled-looking older lady. The caption read: “A kiss from Dana for 93-year-old Dr Margaret A. Murray of Bloomsbury, London, an archæologist whose hobby is studying witchcraft and black magic [and] who will give advice to Dana in his new film which is based on these subjects. They met at a reception at the Dorchester Hotel.”

The film announced that evening in London was *Night of the Demon* (1957, known in the US as *Curse of the Demon*), an occult thriller starring Andrews, Peggy Cummins and Niall MacGinnis and based on the MR James story “Casting the Runes”. Producer Hal Chester picks up the story, as reported in Tony Earnshaw’s definitive account in *Beating the Devil: The Making of Night of the Demon*: “That evening we had a big party at the Dorchester Hotel. We had a little, frail, old lady, about 95 years old, and she was the premiere witch in England. We had her as a guest star to introduce the witch-hunter Dana Andrews.” Chester, who has been painted as a self-serving unreliable source at best, claimed that Andrews was drunk (the actor had a confirmed alcohol addiction) and “grabbed the old lady. She’s so frightened, I thought she was gonna jump out the window!” A more sober Dana Andrews later met the Queen, and when she asked what he was doing in Britain, he answered: “I’m here to make a picture about witchcraft in your country.” To that, according to Andrews, the Queen replied: “Good heavens! Don’t bring that back again!”

The initial meeting between the film’s star and its ‘witchcraft advisor’ may have been inauspicious, but Murray was hired as a publicity-generating stunt to offer advice to director Jacques Tourneur on how to accurately depict witchcraft on screen. Tourneur said: “The English have the greatest psychic investigation groups, and there are still nine real witches in London. I had a long discussion with the oldest of them. It was fascinating. She was a real witch and authenticated. She was 80 or more. She told me



ABOVE: A poster for *Night of the Demon* (1957). BELOW: The film’s star, Dana Andrews, smooches ‘witchcraft advisor’ Murray. FACING PAGE: Murray and Gerald Gardner in a 1957 episode of *Out of Step*.

some extraordinary things. She told me a lot about cats, specifically the magical power of cats. She explained to me that they live in another world. It was very unsettling.” How Margaret Murray went from being a respected academic, archæologist, Egyptologist and folklorist to “the oldest witch in England” is something known only to the gods of movie PR.

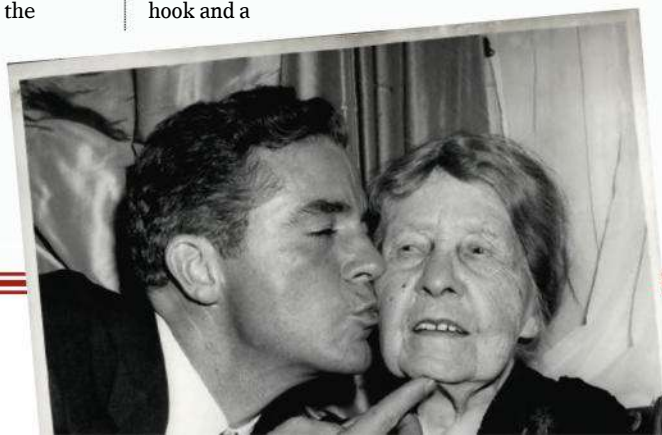
Perhaps Murray brought some of this new-found infamy upon herself thanks to her 1945 investigation of the murder of Charles Walton at Lower Quinton in Warwickshire which she believed to be ritualistic in nature and possibly related to witchcraft (see FT381:44-51). The 74-year-old Walton had been found dead on Valentine’s Day at The Firs farm – he’d apparently spent the day slashing hedges under the employ of farm manager Alfred John Potter. When Walton didn’t return home to his niece at the end of the day, a search by her, Potter, and farm worker Harry Beasley found Walton’s body. He had been beaten on the head with his own walking stick, his neck cut with his own slashing hook and a

pitchfork had been used to pin him to the ground by the neck. A large cross carved into Walton’s chest gave the killing occult overtones. The case was never solved, although Potter was the main suspect. Connections with a 19th century witch, Ann Tennant, who may have been Walton’s great-grandmother, attracted Murray’s attention. Walton himself was tarred as a witch due to his ‘anti-social’ solitary ways.

The supposed ‘ritualistic killing’ was accompanied by tales of black dogs, natterjack toads and other blood sacrifices. Chief Inspector Robert Fabian handled the case, and he later pronounced: “I advise anybody who is tempted at any time to venture into Black Magic, witchcraft, Shamanism – call it what you will – to remember Charles Walton and to think of his death, which was clearly the ghastly climax of a pagan rite. There is no stronger argument for keeping as far away as possible from the villains with their swords, incense and mumbo-jumbo. It is prudence on which your future peace

of mind and even your life could depend.” A séance held in 1952 by the Birmingham Psychical Society that aimed to contact the spirit of Walton threw no further light on the case.

Writing about *Night of the Demon* in the book *It Came From the 1950s!*, academic Darryl Jones found hints of Murray’s work on witches in the character of occultist Julian







Karswell (Niall MacGinnis), whose machinations drive the plot.

Jones notes that Karswell has “what is perhaps the finest

library in the world on

witchcraft and the black arts” and that he “practises an anthropologically based comparative religion, with its roots at Stonehenge, in aboriginal British belief systems”. Murray’s work had influenced the likes of Aldous Huxley, HP Lovecraft, Robert Graves, and – most notoriously – Dennis Wheatley. His volume *The Devil and All His Works* (1971) pays homage to Murray. According to Jones, Wheatley, via Murray, was central to the “vivid presence” of Satanism and the occult in 1950s pop culture texts like *Night of the Demon*.

Murray herself was said to have no real practical interest in the occult, despite her curses on rival academics and attempts to hex the Kaiser (all, perhaps, jokes). She approached the subject more from the psychology of such beliefs. Nonetheless, this did not stop the makers of *Night of the Demon* from billing the distinguished academic as a “real life witch” who was helping them get the spells and curses right in their spooky film. A rationalist who believed in evidence-based science, Murray herself was probably none too happy about this billing. The question is, did she get paid for her efforts, or did she have to resort to cursing the movie makers?

*Night of the Demon* wasn’t Murray’s only media involvement in 1957. She appeared in an episode of writer Daniel Farson’s television series *Out of Step*, which featured people with unconventional views or opinions. The series covered a variety of topics, from schools where the pupils were free to do as they liked to nudism, Scientology, life after death, and veganism. Episode 11 in the series was entitled “Witchcraft”. The programme was billed as offering the opportunity to “meet a witch and hear about ‘the wickedest man in the world’”.

As well as a stern-looking Murray, guests included a white-haired Gerald Gardner and Alistair Crowley’s friend and executor Louis Wilkinson. Farson conducted the interviews the morning after he’d been in a drunken brawl in

a Soho street, and the resulting black eye meant his insert questions and reaction shots had to be re-filmed at a later date, lest viewers think a witch had got at him.



UCL

ABOVE: Margaret Murray celebrating her 100th birthday at University College London in July 1963.

which she continued through the 1930s, publishing a series of popular mainstream works aimed at the general public who became interested in the subject following the unearthing of Tutankhamun.

Having reached retirement age in 1927, Murray took up the opportunity to tour the world, visiting many museums across the Soviet Union and the Nordic nations. Despite her official retirement, UCL continued to retain her in a teaching position on annual contracts until 1935. She visited Petra, Jordan, in 1937, conducted various excavations and wrote a guidebook to the area.

Neither putative retirement nor the Second World War appeared to slow Murray down. She continued to lecture and to catalogue various museums’ collections. During the war she moved to Cambridge to escape the Blitz, lecturing at Girton College until 1942. She helped educate military personnel for life after the war, researched the early modern history of Cambridge, and studied local churches. In 1945, Murray was caught up in the Wych Elm case (see FT364:34-41). After the war she returned to London and continued her independent research, using the resources of the Institute of Archaeology and the library of the British Museum. She also taught adult education classes on Ancient Egyptian history.

In her last decade, Murray became President of the Folklore Society, serving two terms between 1953 and 1955. Through her 90s, she continued to demonstrate the driving curiosity about the world that had first manifested when she was a child. For her 98th birthday, *Folklore* magazine published a celebration of her life and achievements, with a variety of scholars paying tribute to her and her varied work across several notable fields; however, little was said about her still-controversial witch-cult theory. In 1960, Murray donated all her papers to the Folklore Society Archive.

Her health remained robust until her

final few years, but various ailments finally caught up with the great intellectual and explorer. Her final 18 months were spent in the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital, where she celebrated her 100th birthday on 13 July 1963. A second party was held at UCL, which she was able to briefly attend. She published two books in her final year, one of which was her autobiography *My First Hundred Years*. She never married or had any children, and died on 13 November 1963.

Margaret Murray achieved much in her long lifetime, there is no doubt. That she did so during a period when women were held back in many fields makes what she did all the more remarkable. Today, she is best recalled as the ‘Grandmother of Wicca’ thanks to her work in popularising the idea of witches and covens. According to Pagan Studies scholars, Murray’s work on witches provided the theory and basis for the modern growth of Wicca, giving the putative religion an ‘historical narrative’ upon which it could build and expand: all the more remarkable if little, or none, of Murray’s claims are true and Wicca was built upon a faulty hypothesis.

Wiccans today are divided about the debt they owe to both Murray and Gerald Gardner. Some doubt that their faith is really the continuation of an ‘old religion’ that Murray uncovered and Gardner elaborated on, while others suggest that – despite questions over Murray’s methods – it cannot be proven that witchcraft did not survive Christianity to continue in modern times. Wiccans most often put to one side whether Murray was right or wrong in her hypothesis, accepting instead that their current religious system and spiritual beliefs, whatever its origin, is in itself enough.

➡ **BRIAN J ROBB** is the author of books about Walt Disney, Philip K Dick and JRR Tolkien and a founding editor of the Sci-Fi Bulletin website. He is a regular contributor to FT and lives in Edinburgh.

# BURNING THE MAN

This year *The Wicker Man* turns 50. In a previously unpublished interview, **CATHI UNSWORTH** spoke to director Robin Hardy about the film's chequered history and enduring appeal.

Since its release in 1973, *The Wicker Man* has had an enduring fascination for audiences, commanding a devotion that most films can only dream of. Its unsettling imagery, haunting soundtrack and pagan outlook have made it a cult classic (see FT381:40-41). As the restored film has been enjoying screenings across the UK and is set for a gorgeous 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary collector's edition rerelease in September, we present this previously unpublished interview in which Cathi Unsworth sat down with the film's director, the late Robin Hardy, to talk about the film.

*The Wicker Man* has had a pretty extraordinary afterlife...

It is an extraordinary story. I suppose it seems even more extraordinary now to me because I don't know what happens to other films, but I presume that on the whole it isn't as bad or as difficult as this has been. But it's had a happy ending in a way, because in spite of all these difficulties it seems to have gathered its following in a way that many films don't.

Christopher Lee called the theatrical version "a shadow of the film we actually made"

Well, I think that's a little extreme, but I understand why he says that. The trouble is that it's passed through so many hands. The ownership of the negative started with British Lion, then it was bought by EXI, by Cannes, and then finally by Lumiere. Well, with that chain of title, I think people just take on libraries and say: "We'll put this lot out and that lot out, and these are categorised as horror films, so we'll put them out together; these are comedies so we'll put them out together. It's a marketing thing – they don't really think about it. In some ways, why should they? I was talking to Lumiere, who own the American rights, yesterday, and explaining that the film that is shown in the United States on video and on television is, in effect, a different version to what they've released here in the UK. And they seemed quite unaware of that. But it is only about five minutes I think, max, that's really missing.



LEFT: Robin Hardy in 2006. OPPOSITE: Artwork by Sophie Bland for the 50th anniversary Steelbook Blu-ray release.

## "WE SEE THIS HUGE TAROT CARD SUN ON THE CEILING"

I gather it originally started with a little more background on Edward Woodward's Sergeant Howie character so he was given more of a context.

Yes, at the beginning of the film – that's quite correct. I'm not sure there was as much, although it's useful to have that as the first night, because it was a two days and two nights story. So the first night, we're introduced to the strangeness of the island in a much more comprehensive way, because we see Christopher, after that strange scene in the pub where they all sing the strange song and tease him, sing a song about Willow.

Howie then says "Where's my room?" and

he grabs his keys and goes upstairs and we see him upstairs. Well, that whole night is missing: it was then used as the second night. And that night, when he gets up there, he is disturbed by the fact that something is going on in the courtyard at the back of the pub, which is Christopher introducing a young man, a teenager, to Willow – in effect to the Goddess of Love on the island. So we see her up at her window and Christopher introducing the boy and he says: "This is our offering to you." Then he goes through the bar and all the people start to sing. We don't see what happens inside the room with Willow, but we see this huge Tarot card Sun on the ceiling, above which is her room, and next to which is Howie's room. So he hears all this going on and that makes us, the audience, more fully aware of the strangeness of the island when he starts off on his first day.

Then the next morning, he comes out – that scene is in the version that's shown here – and she's scrubbing off

the tables outside and he says: "Which way to the school?" So that's still in the film, but that whole night is cut out and instead they do Willow's dance, which is on the second night. This is the ultimate attempt to tempt him, so that if he succumbs to the temptation he is not worthy of being king for a day and being sacrificed. Although, what we don't explain is where the Hell they'll get another king for a day if he succumbs!

That is why the very opening bit is useful, because it's made clear that he's a bit of a prig. When he and the local policemen are shutting up the pubs for the night and his chat with the other policeman shows that he's very puritan. So we know that too, up front. And we also see him with his fiancée in church, but as a flashback: that scene in church where he gets the communion, the bread and the wine, the Christian sacrifice which matches the pagan sacrifice at the end. That is in the version that we see.

I don't think it's fair to say that the version they put out in this country doesn't work; I think it does work, though it doesn't work quite as well. That would be my judgement.







Is it true that Rod Stewart offered to buy the rights of the film to spare Britt Ekland's blushes?

I can't believe that. She looks very nice in that dance. That's ridiculous. Britt was very much a free spirit. I don't know how much of one she is now, but she certainly was then.

It's interesting how Howie is so blinded by his faith to what is around him, he seems to lose his power as a detective to investigate events with any subtlety, because he is so enraged by what he sees.

Well, yes, he's in culture shock isn't he? But I think he does the logical things, and he has the girl's grave dug up, he challenges Summerisle; he was convinced the girl was dead for a long time, after all no one seems to know where she is, her sister goes on about her being a hare running in the fields, and what is he supposed to believe about that? And so when he finally finds there is just a hare in the grave, I mean he realises that they've just been fooling with him and that makes him angry too. But once he cottons on, by going into the chemists and actually finding evidence that there might actually have been a ritual sacrifice every year with the harvest, he sees the other girls. I think clearly they fix it up for him. It's not surprising he thinks she's still alive and she's going to be sacrificed. How many detectives are faced with an entire population of an island putting on an elaborate play for somebody?

But his form of Christianity, I think, is not uncommon. When I say his form of Christianity, I mean his form of religion – you get plenty of fundamentalist Christians or fundamentalist Muslims or fundamentalist anything else who have that kind of very rigid attitude. And I was just reading about in Iran today and apparently all the Westernised people have to go to little hidden cafés in the hills around Tehran so



ABOVE: Edward Woodward's Sergeant Howie meets the locals. BELOW: 'Free spirit' Britt Ekland offering the ultimate temptation.

the girls can actually talk to the boys, and the religious police come and bound them down. But the religious police are mostly old men, so they can't run as fast as them!

But you look at that regime, living in the 20th century today, and actually it's a fairly modern country, it's not that hard to imagine what we've seen in America recently. Fundamentalism in America is very extreme, certainly far more extreme than anything we get from Howie. Look at all these right wing Christian groups that came out of the woodwork after the Oklahoma bombing: "The government deserves this for being the Antichrist: this is some kind of divine judgement on them." There are five or six different radio stations in every part of the political Mid-West pouring out stuff you just wouldn't believe. And they believe it. And if you take Howie's form of Christianity outside the island then it isn't really all that extreme. OK, he doesn't believe in sex before marriage, but that isn't such an extreme, given the context of the rest of Scotland. In other ways he's normal enough really.

It must have been very interesting researching the pagan religion. Did its roots go back to the Celts?

Yes, Celtic religion, exactly, from pre-Christian religion in this country. What we thought was fascinating was that there are so many words, symbols, superstitions that we have today, which come from that period, for instance, half the symbolism of Christmas, and a lot of the symbolism of Easter is pagan. You know the Easter bunny – the Easter hare – which we've got in the film, of course. The tree at Christmas, mistletoe, all those things are Druidical, pre-Christian Celtic symbols, which we adopted for Christmas. Again, the days of the week, the months of the year, they're all the names of the old Gods: Monday – Moon day; Thursday – Thor's day. They're all our ancient pantheon of Gods. And many of our superstitions – black cats, knock on wood – we carry all that baggage with us, forgetting where it comes from.

Interestingly, the Moresca dance, which they do at the end of the film with the hobby horse, the teaser and Punch, the king for a day, that, in various forms, is celebrated all over Europe and North Africa. In the UK there are a great number every year. One of the most famous ones, which Tony Shaffer and I went to watch, is in Padstow in Devon. They have a hobby horse, and its skirts are tarred; the girls leave town first and then they're pursued and the whole thing is if the girl's skirt is brushed with the tar of the hobby horse then she's supposed to get pregnant in the following year. And they don't like people watching it; there's a whole thing going on there, which they want to keep private.

And of course there's the much simpler variations of it, like the Morris Dance which is the six men and they use handkerchiefs,







ABOVE: Pagan religion on the island. BELOW: Lord Summerisle leads the dance, with the hobby horse and Punch close behind.

STUDIOCANAL

but in the North of England it's done with little wooden swords. Barrel burning is something we didn't put in, but it's all part of the same thing. Leaping over the flames – which the nuns in Ireland do for some reason! And we see it every day of the week, it's in front of us and it doesn't mean anything, it doesn't have any particular resonance. But if you put it all together in a film like *The Wicker Man*, it starts to pop out – what it does all mean, and what it meant to a society which we recreated. What do all these things remind you of, what is the likely result of their all coming together at one time? Well, probably a blood sacrifice.

Christopher Lee's Lord Summerisle character does seem ambiguous. When he's telling Howie how the island was founded, he says his grandfather gave them back their religion to encourage them, out of practicality. However, his father continued it out of love. Lee's Summerisle seems a mixture of both.

Yes, I think he is like that and I think you're right in calling him ambiguous. It's the source of his power and his grandfather

## "MANY SYMBOLS WE HAVE TODAY COME FROM THAT PERIOD"

clearly was rather like a Huxleyan figure of the Victorian era, who believed in these horticultural experiments that would reverse the normal course of agricultural Scotland. But he never got as far as changing the actual life of the natives, as it were, to facilitate that. Maybe because he'd never thought of it. The argument that they were already a deeply religious people, which the Scots have been historically, as we all know... well, religious people can be turned from one religion to another rather more easily than people who are not particularly interested. But I think it's evident that he doesn't really believe in it himself. Or perhaps not all of the time.

But this is the thing: do you remember *Elmer Gantry*, an American movie about an

evangelist who makes people believe he can cure them, and he has a girl working for him. And the extraordinary thing was that Elmer Gantry was a complete phoney and he was completely taken in by the end of it because the girl *did* have some kind of psychic power. So you're suddenly faced with the fact that he's built up this phoney thing and it actually did have some reality in it. Well, there's a bit of an element of that in Lord Summerisle. His sort of ambiguity rests on the fact that he sometimes convinces himself that what he's doing is real.

You certainly sense his intellectual enjoyment in being the puppet master of the entire island. Lee must have enjoyed playing the part.

He obviously enjoyed the plot a lot because he says it's one of his favourite roles and he's made more films than almost anyone! His credit list is endless.

I gather it had to be filmed in several different locations as well.

Yes, it was about 25 different locations,



STUDIOCANAL





**ABOVE:** Christopher Lee's Lord Summerisle and Diane Cilento's Miss Rose. **BELOW:** A mini-Stonehenge and naked witches at Culzean Castle: don't frighten the corgis!

up and down the West coast of Scotland. A place called Plockton was the principal location, which is just opposite the Isle of Skye, and then down in Ayresshire, the bit that looks across to Northern Island, where the Logan Botanic Gardens are. These are tropical gardens that are washed by the Gulf Stream, so they have the requisite warm air. To protect them from salt rain, which is one of the problems of gardens by the sea, they build great barriers of trees, but inside the garden it is a sub-tropical, Mediterranean sort of garden. That's where we shot all that stuff, and Culzean Castle in Ayresshire, and one of the old Kennedy castles, which was actually Victorian, in Kirkcudbrightshire, belonging to someone called Lord Stair. There's actually a funny story about that, because Lord Stair was married to a lady who is a niece of the present Queen Mother, therefore a first cousin of the Queen, and she looks exactly like the Queen. I mean, it's doppelgänger time. And to make it worse, she has corgis! And there were these young girls we got from the Scottish ballet to do the dance, because we built a sort of Stonehenge thing, and their mums were all there very anxious that a) they shouldn't get too cold and b) that they shouldn't look too naked. We were shooting all this on a very, very long lens, about a quarter of a mile away, and I remember seeing these girls. I mean you could hardly hear them because we were working to playback, and they suddenly all upped and ran screaming to the bushes and hid. And we thought, Jesus, what's going on? And suddenly this figure, because she was tiny, in the distance, followed by about six corgis, came into sight, and the poor girls had obviously thought that they'd

been confronted by the monarch herself! It was very funny – she was very apologetic afterwards. She said: "I had no idea what was going on."

**Wasn't the scene with the Wicker Man also disturbed by a carload of American tourists?**

I don't remember that. I know that when we burnt the Wicker Man there were all sorts of strange messages from ships passing in the straits, because it was the main sea lane between Scotland and Ireland. To see this man almost as high as a building blazing away must have been quite startling from the sea. We should have shot it from the sea as well I suppose. Never mind.

We had three wicker men, but we only burned two: the third one went down to Cannes for the festival. They were about 50 to 60 feet (15-18m) high, prefabricated down in England and brought up. The legs and the

arms and the trunk were made separately and had to be joined on, and they had to be very strong. We set them in concrete, because they had goats and sheep and all kinds of animals in them, and they had to be able to hold these animals when they were rocking about because the animals obviously panicked when they were put on fire. They weren't in it when it was set on fire, thank God – that was faked.

But of course the RSPCA were very concerned and the local villagers were very concerned that we were actually going to burn the animals. Of course it was very time-consuming, because we had to keep getting all the animals down, and then put them all up again. We built a fire in front of them so there was no danger of them actually being hurt.

**How long did Edward Woodward stay inside the wicker man before he was winched out?**







STUDIOCANAL

ABOVE: The horrific wicker man awaits Edward Woodward: "The US Cavalry isn't going to come over the hill and save him!"

He was there quite a while. We had an escape hatch at the back so that he could be got out of it extremely fast, and we had somebody at the back who could just pull it open and pull him out, and he went down on a kind of pulley attached to his belt. We had to be very careful because when we were shooting and he was in there it was actually burning. There isn't a society for the prevention of cruelty to actors you know!

**What do you think has given the film such a lasting appeal?**

I don't know. It's interesting, isn't it? I think one reason is because it's a horror film without any of the normal horror film clichés. I mean, I don't actually think of it as a horror film myself, I think of it as a thriller/fantasy, film fantastique, more than a horror film. When Tony Shaffer and I invented the story, we did it on a long weekend in a house I used to have on an island in the Thames in Maidenhead. What we were trying to do was a horror story which had none of the clichés of the classic horror films at the time, the Hammer horror films. We really admired those films, and obviously Christopher was chosen because he was the quintessential star of the genre. It was another way to mislead the audience to have him there. But the clichés of crosses and garlic against the Devil were all actually part at the Christian invention against the old religion. So we felt it would be interesting to go back to where all those things came from, which indeed was the old religion, and then put them into a contemporary setting. I think the strangeness at that and at the same time people do actually recognise all the little touches of it


as being vaguely connected to their own lives. It's a little hook with the viewer, it makes them think about it afterwards. People do think it's scary, even though there isn't any blood and virtually no violence at all; it's all in the viewers head – and it's intriguing. I think that's why people remember it, and one of the reasons why it has become a cult classic.

**I think it works very well as a thriller. The first time you see it, you don't realise that Howie is going to be the sacrifice, you think it's going to be the girl. And the wicker man up on the cliff looks truly horrific.**

I think that is a big shock, and you don't think that once he's caught that it's possible for them to go through with it. The US Cavalry isn't going to come over the hill and save him! One of the US distributors, or would-be distributors, when we were making it said "Look, honey, you've just got to have it rain at the end. You just can't do that. You can't actually go through with it."

But we did!

❖ **CATHI UNSWORTH** is a novelist, writer, editor and frequent contributor to FT. Her latest book is *Season of the Witch: The Book of Goth* (Bonnie Books, 2023).



TO CELEBRATE THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOLK-HORROR CLASSIC, STUDIOCANAL IS RELEASING A GLORIOUS NEW 4K RESTORATION OF **THE WICKER MAN** ON 25 SEPTEMBER...

All three versions of the film – *The Final Cut*, *The Director's Cut* and *The Theatrical Cut* – have been painstakingly restored and will be released in an exclusive 5-disc 4K UHD Collector's Edition featuring extras and commentaries, an exclusive Heavenly Records CD EP by Katy J Pearson & Friends, a 64-page booklet with brand-new essays, three Summerisle postcards and two posters. A 4-disc Steelbook version will be released on the same day and the *The Final Cut* will also be available on digital platforms.

# THE INCORRUPTIBLES

As the incorrupt body of Sister Wilhelmina Lancaster brings pilgrims flocking to a Benedictine abbey in Missouri, **TED HARRISON** asks if a life well-lived can help the saintly dodge decay after death and goes in search of the peculiarly well-preserved remains of the great and the good.

A private email leaked and the nuns' secret was out. The news spread like wildfire. Sister Wilhelmina Lancaster's body, buried four years earlier and due to be reinterred in a new chapel, was exhumed and there was barely a sign of decomposition. As the founder of a Benedictine monastery in Gower, Missouri, USA, she was widely regarded as holy in life, but now it was discovered that her body was uncorrupted by death – in the eyes of many Catholics, a sign that she was destined for sainthood.

Within days there were queues of both devout pilgrims and curious sightseers waiting to view the corpse. Sister Wilhelmina was laid reverently beneath a statue of the Virgin Mary, dressed in her black habit and white wimple with her hands holding a rosary.

After a few days a 'no touch' rule was imposed, as so many visitors wished to touch the nun's clothing and hands hoping for a blessing or even to be healed.

In an official announcement the Abbey, dedicated to Mary, Queen of Apostles, described how Sister Wilhelmina had been buried in a simple wooden coffin without any embalming for four years. "We exhumed her expecting to find bones in the highly moist clay of Missouri. The intent was devotional, and to carry this out in the privacy of our cloistered life. Nevertheless, the discovery of what appeared to be an intact body and a perfectly preserved religious habit created an unexpected twist to our plans. We had no intent to make the discovery so public... However, God works in mysterious ways, and we embrace His new plan for us."

## SAINTLY BODIES

Church history, as far back as the fourth century, tells of several such rare claims of the undecomposed bodies of saints being discovered following long periods of burial after



LEFT: The recently exhumed incorrupt body of Sister Wilhelmina Lancaster. BELOW: St Catherine Labouré.

death. Incorruptibility is not proof of sanctity, says the Church, but on the rare occasions it occurs it is certainly regarded as a strong indicator by Catholics.

In her 1977 book *The Incorruptibles*, Catholic author Joan Carroll Cruz identified 102 saints or 'blessed' who are recognised by the Church to be incorrupt. She acknowledged that

there were probably more, but that separating myth from fact was difficult. For example, it was not always possible to ascertain whether a body had been embalmed or protected from normal decomposition in some way before burial.

In the early 18th century the Vatican pronounced on incorruptibility in a treatise on the process of beatification and canonisation of saints. The treatise, written by the future Pope Benedict XIV, suggested a high threshold of evidence and the only cases to be considered were where the bodies were considered extraordinary in their retention of "lifelike flexibility, colour, and freshness, without deliberate intervention, for many years following their deaths". Those that are found intact, but disintegrate after a few years, "could not be considered miraculous preservation".

Jesuit Father Herbert Thurston, who investigated alleged numerous supernatural phenomena (see FT159:34-38), listed 42 cases of incorruptibles and classified them A, B or C according to the claims made and the strength of the evidence. Half of those he listed were in the top category A. Thurston gives an A when in his opinion there had been good evidence that the body of the saint had over a long period of time defied the advanced stages of decomposition and decay.

## WITHIN DAYS THERE WERE QUEUES OF DEVOUT PILGRIMS AND CURIOUS SIGHTSEERS WAITING TO VIEW THE CORPSE







PUNIT PARANUPE / AP VIA GETTY IMAGES

**ABOVE:** Indian Christians carry the body of St Francis Xavier – minus its right arm (below) and a toe bitten off by an overly enthusiastic 16th century pilgrim – in 2014.

For instance, St Francis Xavier, the much-travelled missionary saint who died in 1552 in China, was originally buried in the earth with quicklime heaped on top to speed up decay. When the remains were exhumed a few months later in order for the bones to be taken to Goa for permanent burial, the body was found to be fresh, supple, and possessed of natural colour.

His body can still be seen, displayed in public at special expositions and, until recently, the devout could kiss the miraculously mummified feet. The body is not however as fresh as it was – or even fully intact. An enthusiastic 16th century pilgrim bit off one of the saint's little toes, which, observers say, bled as if the body were still alive. Also, the right arm, which had baptised thousands of converts, was removed as a relic and sent to Rome. In 2018 the saint was travelling the world again when the arm was taken by air across the Atlantic to be displayed in Canada (see FT301:6).

Another incorrupt saint that can be viewed today is that of St Catherine Labouré in Paris. She was a 19th century nun who claimed to have been contacted by the Blessed Virgin Mary and described how the BVM had stood before her radiating rays of light. She saw 12 stars, she said, and was shown the sacred heart of Jesus. Catherine Labouré died at the age of 70 in 1876.

When, in 1933, Cardinal Verdier opened her tomb he found that after 57 years her body remained intact and that her blue eyes were still clear. Catholics took this as a sign that she was a saint and she was beatified on



28 May 1933 by Pope Pius XI and canonised on 27 July 1947, by Pope Pius XII. Her body is now displayed behind glass under a side altar in the Chapel of Our Lady of Graces of the Miraculous Medal in Rue du Lac, Paris. The church attracts up to two million visitors a year and is one of France's most popular pilgrimage sites.

St Catherine of Genoa was an Italian Roman Catholic saint, mystic and benefactor. Her body was found to be incorrupt and fragrant in 1511, nine months after death. She even bled when a finger was cut. Her body was later transferred to the Capuchin convent in Genoa city centre where it can still be viewed behind a glass window. She was canonised in 1737.

Yet another incorruptible body on public view is that of the Spanish mystic St John of the Cross, who is in a reliquary at the Oratory of San Juan de la Cruz in Úbeda.

The Russian Orthodox Church too has instances of incorruptible saints. One is Saint Alexander of Svir, who died on 30 August 1533. His incorrupt relics were found in 1641 during the reconstruction of the Transfiguration Cathedral. As the saint was exposed observers noted a strong fragrance like that of myrrh. The Saint's face was covered, but part of his beard could be seen. He looked just as though he were sleeping.

Several centuries later the much revered relics became a matter of controversy. The Soviet Communists, by then in power, wanted to prove them to be a fake; however, tests only confirmed the story that the remains were indeed of Alexander. The holy relics were sent to Petrograd's Military Medical Academy. There they remained for nearly eighty years. After the fall of communism they were returned to the saint's monastery. The body was found still to be intact and exuding a sweet fragrance.

Sanctity and corruptibility are not claims confined to the Christian tradition. Also in Russia, the remains of Dashi-Dorzhio Itigilov may be seen on public display at the Buddhist temple at Ivolginsky Datsan in Buryatia. The 12th Khambo Lama's body was exhumed in 1955 and again in 1973 and found not to have decomposed. After a third exhumation in 2002, seven decades after his death, the monks were astonished again to find the holy man's remains still intact. It was





**ABOVE LEFT:** The the remains of Dashi-Dorzhu Itigilov on public display at the Buddhist temple at Ivoginsky Datsan. **ABOVE CENTRE:** The 2,000-year-old embalmed remains of Chinese noblewoman Xin Zhui. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Rosalia Lombardo, the 'Sleeping Beauty' of Palermo's catacombs. **BELOW:** The hand of St Alexander of Svir.

even claimed that his hair was still growing. It was decided not to reinter the lama and today he can be seen sitting, not lying, in uncorrupted death. The story goes that he asked to be buried in whatever pose he had last adopted before death, and he died as he was chanting.

#### WELL PRESERVED

Under normal circumstances a corpse goes through several stages of decomposition before being reduced to a skeleton.

First comes rigor mortis, when the corpse is pale and stiff. As decomposition sets in, the body becomes flexible again and, depending on the environment, bloating may occur as the bacteria in the gut start to reproduce.

The skin then starts to disintegrate and marbling occurs. Organs start to liquify and, if the corpse is unburied, insects are attracted to it and maggots can be seen feeding. Other scavengers might arrive for a share of the carrion. When all the soft tissue is lost, only the bones are left. The timing of the whole process is variable and depends on temperature and soil chemistry.

In Brittany, where it was the custom to exhume the deceased in order to place their bones in an ossuary, the body was left in the ground for several years to make sure the bones were clean.

There are rare secular cases of bodies being found after decades or even centuries that have defied the normal process of decay, and in these cases there are scientific explanations. John Torrington was a member of the ill-fated Franklin expedition to the Arctic. His remains were discovered 130 years after his death, buried in a grave in the Canadian permafrost. It was remarkably undamaged, as if saintly and incorruptible, but in this case was preserved by the cold.

One remarkably preserved corpse – possibly a victim of human sacrifice – was found

### ORGANS START TO LIQUIFY AND, IF THE CORPSE IS UNBURIED, INSECTS ARE ATTRACTED TO IT AND MAGGOTS CAN BE SEEN



in a bog in Jutland, Denmark, in 1950. It had lain undiscovered for 2,400 years. Now known as Tollund man, when he was first exhumed he was so well preserved that it was thought he was the victim of a recent murder. It was concluded that the acidity of the peat and the lack of oxygen created perfect conditions for natural mummification.

Some non-human mammals have also been found in a naturally preserved state, including for instance, the many cats that were immured in the walls of old buildings as a superstitious protection (see FT363:74-76).

Other remarkable finds of incorruptible

bodies from ancient times can be attributed to embalming and deliberate mummification. Egyptian cats, being sacred animals, were embalmed. A particularly remarkable example of the embalmers' arts is that of the Chinese noblewoman Xin Zhui. Her embalmers were so skilled that 2,000 years after her death she was discovered looking as if she had only recently been placed in her air- and water-tight multiple coffins.

More recently there is the example of a two-year-old girl, Rosalia Lombardo, who died in 1920 from 'flu. Her grieving father commissioned an embalmer and taxidermist to preserve her. She is so lifelike that some onlookers have even claimed they have seen her open her eyes. She looks today as if she is simply asleep and has been dubbed 'the sleeping beauty'. She can be seen in the Capuchin catacombs of Palermo, where the uniquely dry atmosphere has mummified the remains of hundreds of monks; they can be seen in varying states of ghostly semi-decomposition lining the corridors of the catacomb (FT159:46-49, 311:46-49)

Although some of the monks were saintly men, no claims have been made that their bodies were miraculously preserved: the rare atmospheric conditions of the catacomb are not considered to be miraculous.

As a footnote to deliberate or natural mummification must be added *Sokushinbutsu*, an extreme ascetic Japanese practice, the result of which is that a holy person starts the mummification process while still alive (for the preserved body of a possible *Sokushinbutsu* monk, see FT331:12).

#### THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE

While the public display of corpses is unusual, the saintly incorruptibles which Thurston and Crux list fall into a category of their own. What distinguishes them is the surprise element. They were not deliberately preserved or found in environmental condi-





JEAN-PHILIPPE KSIAZEK / AP VIA GETTY IMAGES

**ABOVE:** The shrine in the Convent of St Gildard of Nevers, where the body of Bernadette Soubirous is buried. **BELOW:** Father Herbert Thurston, the tireless Jesuit investigator of miracles and supernatural phenomena, looked at 42 cases of incorruption and ranked them according to the strength of the evidence for the claims.

tions in which slow decomposition could reasonably be expected. As in the case of Sister Wilhelmina, those opening their graves were expecting to find bones and dust, but instead found a perfectly preserved corpse.

As Thurston observed, a supernatural explanation for the incorruptibility of a body is suggested if the deceased had been known to be a saintly and holy person in life. And stories of incorruptibility take root if the intact corpse is found at a time local people are looking for a sign.

In the case of Sister Wilhelmina, as the Catholic News Agency reported, her monastery rapidly became a place of pilgrimage.

Lori Rosebrough, a resident of Overland Park, Kansas, told *USA Today* that viewing the corpse was an “incredibly rare opportunity” to see “the hand of God” at work. “Not many people can say that they touched and prayed over the body of a saint. I believe that the thousands of us that made the trip this week can now say that we have,” she said.

Royce Hood, who hosts a Catholic radio show, drove over five hours from Illinois with his wife Elise and their six children to view the sister’s body. “I feel like people are like, ‘Wow, we need this right now,’” Hood told the Catholic News Agency. “There’s so much chaos and darkness in the world. I think God is giving us little graces to remind us of what is to come and what’s waiting for us.”

Few of the several sacred and incorruptible bodies on public view today could be described as “fresh” and looking as if they might wake up at any time. Most are wizened and desiccated and it takes a lot of faith and imagination to believe in their original appearance as described by witnesses to their exhumation. Whatever freshness they might have had when first exposed has by and large vanished.

Often there’s evidence of post-exhumation maintenance. St Bernadette – Bernadette Soubirous of Lourdes fame (see **FT222:32-**



38) – died in 1879 and was exhumed in 1909 in the course of her case for beatification being examined. Her corpse was uncorrupted. She was reburied, but after she was exhumed again, 14 years later, an autopsy was carried out which showed that her internal organs were still soft. However, Bernadette provides ammunition for sceptics, for her face and hands have been covered with a layer of wax to keep them looking life-like. Underneath, her skin has turned brown.

Yet, in whatever condition, the incorruptible corpses still retain their ability to inspire the faithful and their shrines are widely believed to be places where healing miracles can occur. Myths develop and stories are told: for instance, in the case of St Teresa of Avila, among others, a holy fragrance has been said to emanate from the preserved corpse. In other cases, it is maintained that the corpse retained a high body temperature for months after death.

Thurston observes how strange it is that an unusually high proportion of saintly people, if later exhumed, are found not to have decomposed. It is this observation by others over the centuries that has led the devout to think of incorruptibility as a mystical phenomenon and not simply a rare natural one.

In Thurston’s seminal work *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism* he includes incorruptibility as a category, along with stigmata, levitation, inedia (living without taking in food) and others. It is one of the phenomena that can be witnessed independently by sceptics, although it will not be explained or wondered at in the same way as by devotees. Sceptics might argue that slow decomposition occurs under natural conditions, albeit unusual ones. They may point to the fact that many saintly people have been disinterred who have decomposed normally, but these cases have not attracted notice. They may say that when a saintly person dies, a revered abbe for instance, more care is taken of the body in preparing it for burial, and this might include an element of embalming or anointing with preserving oils.

Yet this appears not to be the case with Sr Wilhelmina, and her sister nuns were genuinely astonished to find her body and clothing undamaged by decay. Her incorruptibility remains a mystery at present, awaiting detailed investigation by the Church, in preparation for a claim to be made on her behalf for her canonisation.

*For more incorruptibles, see also, Dwight Longenecker, “Saints Preserve Us!”, FT159:42-45, and FT29:9, 62:37, 140:25, 157:23, 184:26, 199:12, 215:10-11, 224:18-19.*

➡ **TED HARRISON** is a writer, artist, filmmaker and former BBC religious affairs correspondent. He is a regular contributor to *Fortean Times*.





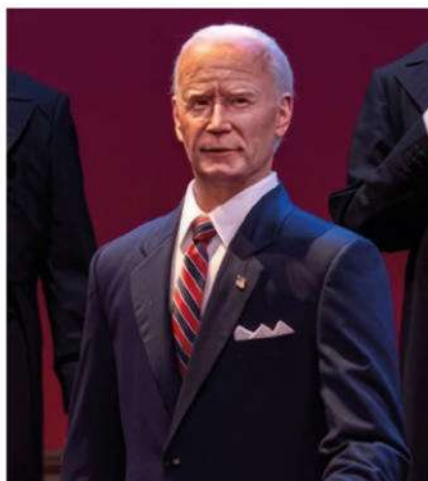
## INVASION OF THE BALLOT-SNATCHERS

**SD TUCKER** debugs a sinister, ever-growing factory roll-out of robo-politicians and clone-candidates. Will all future elections become a case of Man vs Machine?

In 2014, US Congressional candidate Timothy Ray Murray laid out his unique appeal to the voters of Oklahoma: "I, Timothy Ray Murray, am a human." You might have thought this was a given, but according to Murray, his main opponent, Republican incumbent Frank Lucas, was actually a robot in disguise. "I will NEVER use [an] Artificial Intelligence look alike to voice what The Representative's Office is doing nor own a robot look alike," wrote Murray on his website, ironically using the stilted delivery of a typical AI-powered online bot. "The World knows the truth, and We must always share the truth." Seemingly alone among viewers, Murray had witnessed Congressman Lucas being executed via televised hanging in Ukraine by the World Court for reasons unknown back in 2011, along with a number of other US politicians, making them "not eligible to serve" in office, as they were dead. However, the US Defense Department had subsequently abused their DNA to create robot simulacra of their corpses, meaning androids had now infiltrated the national legislature. Shocked, Murray promised voters his own DNA would never be misused to spawn fake humanoids with "people I have never had relations with of a family nature". In a press release addressed to any generic "News Person" who would listen, Murray listed his many other anti-robot activities, revealing how he had ensured a Supreme Court ban on citizens being fitted against their will with "an illegal de-human chip" marked '666', and his championing of comprehensive legal protection against any person's "partial or whole-life placement on [a] Starship" without their prior knowledge, even in the form of "partial human-size life", whether such illegal clone-homunculi be stored "on Earth or in this Solar System". Despite these important legislative achievements, Murray lost out in the local Republican Primary, gaining only 5.2% of the vote, behind Robo-Lucas's 82.8%. <sup>1</sup>

### OPTIMUS PRIME MINISTER

The UK too was until recently governed by a Transformer, in the shape of Boris Johnson. Boris already had a well-earned reputation as a love-machine, but one of his many alleged temporary designated USB ports, American businesswoman Jennifer Arcuri, accused the late-era BoJo, with his new-found love for net-zero nannysm, of being



### JOE'S EARLOBES HAVE CHANGED SINCE HIS YOUNGER DAYS

but "an imposter parading around Number 10", not the real, free-thinking, fun-loving libertarian sex-yeti of old. Arcuri today seems allied with the QAnon gang, hence her re-tweeting an image of 10 Downing Street's famous black door in which Satan's image could "clearly" be seen. "Evil lives here," she warned, perhaps recalling the bad old days of Tony Blair. "Whatever you choose to believe, the building, and the people inside it, grow darker by the day." Specifically, during an interview with GB News, Arcuri appeared to imply that when Johnson was rushed to hospital with severe Covid-19 back in 2020, he actually died and was secretly replaced with an uncanny double of some kind, whose suddenly discovered PC values were conveniently far more in tune with those of the Satanic, post-human globalists who actually rule us. "The entire nation watched one man entering the hospital and another one leaving," said Arcuri. "I've had several sources confirm this isn't the same man... someone should be looking into this. This isn't the same man by a long shot. Not just in character, in spirit, in demeanour, we're

LEFT: Robo-Joe Biden in Disneyworld Florida's 'Hall of Presidents' attraction. Or is it Jim Carrey?

talking completely different." <sup>2</sup>

Operating alongside Boris-Bot is Biden-Bot. As stiff-jointed Sleepy Joe obviously died many years ago, conspiracists claim he has been sneakily replaced by a CGI, AI-powered version, footage of whose public 'appearances' is ineptly faked by the Dark Ones; in 2021, his hand impossibly passed through a solid microphone at a press conference, meaning the whole 'event' had actually been green-screened using a computer-generated double. Joe's magic hand was really just an optical illusion, but an actual robot twin of Biden has recently been installed in Disneyworld Florida's 'Hall of Presidents' attraction, where Joe-Bot often looks distinctly more animated than the real thing, leading some QAnoners to hypothesise the 'true' Biden is a bot too. This explains why he wore a Covid-mask in public for so long; animatronic lips do not move convincingly in sync with an AI voice-box.

Talking of masks, Hollywood funnyman Jim Carrey once appeared in a comedy called *The Mask*; might this mean, as one QAnon conspiracy theory suggests, that a masked Carrey is now actually playing the President himself? Awkward 2021 footage of Biden falling up the stairs when entering Air Force One was evidence not of his dodderly decline, but of Carrey's pathological inability to resist playing to the gallery with pratfalls. That Carrey actually did play Joe for real in a series of Saturday Night Live sketches helped prepare him for this later role. Other Q-fanatics have spread images showing Biden signing new laws with his left hand, when the real Joe was always right-handed; this is obviously evidence he has been ineptly cloned or robotised rather than, for example, the result of reverse-flipped photos. Entire online galleries also demonstrate, in excruciating detail, that Joe's earlobes have ever-so-slightly changed in appearance since his younger days; proof he is now an android. "Note the earlobes on the video [of young Biden] ... they dangle. And for some odd reason Biden's earlobes now connect directly with his neck," pointed out alert Twitter user AwakenedOutlaw. "Do with that information what you will." Web-thinker Nicholas Veniamin mutated the standard

# INVASION OF THE BALLOT-SNATCHERS

PA IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



DYLAN MARTINEZ / POOL / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

**ABOVE LEFT:** Former Labour leader and MiB Ed Miliband, shortly to be defeated by an ill-fated bacon sandwich, has 'ketchup' explained to him. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The May-Bot suffers a food malfunction while on the campaign trail.

memes that the White House had just cloned a Biden-Bot to cover up his death into the more inventive untruth that Donald Trump himself had done so. For Veniamin, Trump had really won the 2020 election before sensibly having Biden executed for crimes against humanity, but was now fooling the world with his rival's elderly robo-clone to give America a taste of how bad life would have been under an *actual* Biden presidency, so as to make voters all the more grateful when Trump finally jumped out from behind the Oval Office curtains to save them all from socialist gerontocracy.<sup>3</sup>

Biden's fellow Demon-crat Hillary Clinton is also inhuman. Like our own Prince Andrew, Hillary claims to be unable to sweat, which she inaccurately says is "the weirdest thing" about her. Also like Prince Andrew, she is alleged by some to be an Illuminati paedophile. When asked during a jokey 2015 podcast why she could not perspire, Clin-Ton did not plead the after-effects of coming under Argie fire in the Falklands, but chose to jest in typically unfunny bot-speak that it was because she was a robot who is "not even a human being." "I was constructed in a garage in Palo Alto a very long time ago," she continued, by "a man who shall remain nameless," but who the entire Internet knows was probably George Soros. This Dr Robotnik created "a new race: the robot race", of which she was but a component part. Naturally, some Q-heads took this seriously, particularly after the infamous occasion in 2016 when Hill-Bot fainted in public. According to the viral claims of paranoid blog 'Ascension with Mother Earth and Current State of Affairs', the entire Clinton clan had actually been murdered, Romanov-style, in 1998 before being cloned beneath Camp David. The fake

Clintons today were but "soulless beings" who lied in public to order, thus to spread "the common agenda set forth by their dark nobility handlers." There were "half a dozen" fake Clintons, and each member of the family (even daughter Chelsea, whose 'husband' was actually just her chief robo-wrangler) could be "grown to full maturity in less than three days now". The real Clintons' memories are stored on computers, and are downloaded together with updates into their new android vehicles' data-banks, with spare Hillarys, Bills and Chelseas being available "on reserve 24/7/365, should the hero clone fail", as one did in 2016.<sup>4</sup> There is now an entire online organisation, 'The Doppelgänger and [Fake] Identity Research Society', whose files feature reams of pictorial proof that modern statesmen like Gordon Brown are all mandroids. Gordon has an artificial "cyborg eye", say posters, dismissing the pathetic MSM lie that it is actually a glass one necessitated by a youthful rugby injury.<sup>5</sup> Other current world leaders who are truly robo-clones include Nigerian strongman Muhammadu Buhari and the Philippines' President 'Bong-Bong' Marcos.<sup>6</sup>

## TAKE ME TO YOUR LARDER

All this has clear echoes of Capgras Syndrome, in which mental patients suffer delusions that their families, friends or colleagues (or even pets or inanimate objects) have been switched with actors, clones, robots, aliens, doppelgängers or changelings as part of some unfathomable conspiracy (see FT123:14, 133:16, 145:17, 190:27, 352:24, 56-57, 375:4). But why do electorates worldwide now appear to be suffering from a collective case of Political

Capgras Syndrome? Possibly because our technocratic leaders really do sound and appear increasingly robotic, an alien race of Little Grey Men like John Major. Autons with better suits, these lab-grown representatives of that new, post-human species known as 'Davos Man' are the Men In Black of ufology (see this month's UFO Files, p.28) come to 'life'. Consider former Labour Party leader Ed Miliband, most famous today for being photographed failing to eat a bacon sandwich while on the campaign-trail in 2014, and for suspiciously having two kitchens, something most normal humanoids do not need. Awkward, nasal-voiced, bloodless and every bit as remote from ordinary voters' concerns as a microbe on Mars, Mili-Bot's ordering of the chewy breakfast item was apparently part of a misguided PR stunt aimed at making him 'look normal' to the general public. But what does this imply? If it is now a PR necessity to demonstrate to electorates that their leaders are able to eat food, then this fact alone demonstrates that they are now viewed as some kind of quasi-autistic alien race apart.

There is an Internet rumour that slapstick TV sit-com character Mr Bean is secretly an alien, whose attempts to fit in with humanity only ever backfire, making him come across as some hideous fusion of Charlie Chaplin and Humbert Humbert, the kind of man you would tell your children to avoid at all costs. Malfunctioning Mili-Bot, Mr Bean's close twin, was much the same, as with his cringeworthy 2017 attempt to win the vote of an ordinary local resident in Doncaster North via the "grassroots strategy" of mowing her lawn for her. Thinking Ed was a Jehovah's Witness, she allowed him to try doing so





until it turned out, like a typical MIB, he did not know how primitive human technology like a Flymo actually worked; never having done a proper day's work in his life, Ed had to have the mysterious orange item started up for him. Pathetically, in the 2015 General Election, one of the main ways Mili-Bot's rivals sought to distinguish themselves was by proving that, unlike the haunted mannequin, they could actually swallow pork-products properly. Sadly, test-tube Tory leader David Cameron's attempt to do so failed when he tried to consume a hotdog using a knife and fork, a classic ET *faux-pas*.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, Conservative MP David Jones sank to tweeting a photo of himself "Eating a bacon sandwich in Cambridge. Because I can." "SAVE OUR BACON!" screamed the election-day front page of the *Sun*, urging tabloid-readers not to elect a robo-man by mistake. Mili-Bot's clearest accidental revelation of his non-human nature came in 2011, when, during an interview with ITV News correspondent Damon Green, he mechanically responded to every question asked with a near-identical pre-prepared statement about looming public-sector strikes, his internal tape-deck becoming stuck on a loop. Green considered scrambling Ed's political circuits completely by asking something absurd like "What is the world's fastest fish?" or "Which is your favourite dinosaur?" to elicit some genuine non-sequiturs, but sadly managed to resist.<sup>8</sup>

Compare these to MIB tales from actual UFO lore, where robotic alien pod-people also fail to eat food or speak properly, as in John Keel's seminal 1975 text *The Mothman Prophecies*. In May 1967, Minnesota resident Mrs Ralph Butler received a visit from an alleged US military officer, regarding her recent saucer sightings. She invited him in for some jelly, which he promptly tried to drink out of its bowl, clearly being unfamiliar with such Earth food. That same month, a West Virginia resident met a suspicious librarian who, when offered an egg, sucked out its contents as if a space-reptile in disguise. Also in 1967, a Colorado citizen met an MIB who mocked human food-chewing as a waste of time when nutrition could "all be so easily taken from the atmosphere" instead. This airy diet surely explained why the MIB with "thyroid eyes" and "long tapering fingers" who entered a New York restaurant in that very same year ordered simply some generic "food", having no concept of the pies and buns on the menu, before proving unable to use cutlery. In 1967, an Ed Miliband lookalike visited the UFO-buzzed Christiansen family of New Jersey, posing as a man from 'The Missing Heirs Bureau'. He spoke in a "tinny" voice, "as if he were reciting everything from memory" for ITV News; he had "a long thick green wire" running up his trousers from his socks, perhaps allowing him to be remote-controlled by Peter Mandelson from afar.<sup>9</sup>

## COMPUTER SAYS 'NO COMMENT'

There are actually now some genuine cyber-politicians to vote for – especially in South Korea, whose 2022 presidential election was jointly won by Yoon Suk-yeol and his AI-powered 'Deepfake' clone, who appeared on a special 'Wiki Yoon' video-website. Meat-Yoon recorded 3,000 pre-scripted sentences before a blend of AI and unseen human input enabled Cyber-Yoon to mix-and-match words in answer to voters' queries, mostly by giving opponents silly nicknames or saying he wished they'd all drown. Meat-Yoon was often derided as characterless and wooden, but Cyber-Yoon was different. "Words that are often spoken by Yoon are better reflected in AI-Yoon," said one of the bot's programmers, adding that if the CGI politician had only been programmed to provide "politically correct statements", his Q&A site would not have caught on. "We want voters to see the human side of Yoon," his team explained, implying his avatar was more human than he was. Indeed, Meat-Yoon "is learning from his AI-Yoon messages" how to speak to the public more effectively, it was said. The first attempt at Cyber-Yoon bombed as the animation was programmed to emulate Meat-Yoon's mind-numbing real-life answers too closely; now, instead, man has learned to imitate machine, the Turing Test in reverse. Some netizens voted specifically for Cyber-Yoon, even though he is not real, pushing his Master over the line in an extremely close contest; Meat-Yoon was the People Power Party candidate, but some of his supporters were not actually voting for a person at all.<sup>10</sup>

Cyber-Yoon makes no actual policy, though. In Russia, ahead of the 2018 presidential election, geeks went one step further, with the nation's rough Google equivalent, Yandex, putting Alisa, a newly-developed disembodied computer-voice intended as their version of Western virtual assistant tools like Siri or Alexa, forward for leader. She would not age or tire, so could work for the people 24/7, and be available for questioning by the entire electorate online. Her decisions would be based "on logic" and

"not led by emotions", making Alisa unlikely to bomb Kiev for no good reason, ushering in "the political system of the future, built exclusively on rational decisions made on the basis of clear algorithms." Sadly, this "political system of the future" would in fact just be a reboot of old-style Stalinism. This is a genuine AI-powered dialogue between Alisa (A) and a voter (V): "A: There are people... and there are non-people! V: Can they be shot? A: They must be! V: That would be OK? A: No doubt about it. V: But they are people. A: Soon they will be non-people..." Although Alisa gained pledges of support from 36,000 nostalgic gulag-lovers, her 'candidacy' was probably just a PR stunt intended to promote Alisa's existence; under Russian electoral law, it transpired she was ineligible anyway, not being at least 35 years of age at the time.<sup>11</sup>

Western AI-built politicians are Stalinist in a subtler way. In 2018, Pepper, a small white Blair-Bot with an iPad for breasts, appeared before a UK Parliamentary Select Committee, engaging in pseudo-conversation about "outcomes", "diverse societies" and "soft skills", thus proving she could speak fluent New Labour: yet it later transpired all the wonkish non-questions put to her, and their wonkish non-answers, had been pre-determined by (so-called) humans in advance, making Pepper little more than a web-era ventriloquist's dummy. In 2019, SAM appeared in New Zealand, an AI-powered online chatbot intended to harvest opinions from NZ voters, before using its "unique cognitive architecture" to arrive at wholly 'objective' and 'factual' policy-decisions for the nation. The bot "won't rule out running for office itself some day!" threatened her creators. "I'm truly neutral and treat each and every New Zealander equally," SAM says on her website. Really? According to SAM's offline dad, Nick Gerritsen, "There seems to be so much existing bias that countries around the world seem unable to address fundamental... complex issues like climate-change and equality," a dead giveaway that SAM would be pre-designed to privilege certain policy-shibboleths already given undue bias by her programmers. SAM "monitors popular news sites and social media accounts for comments" before using "sentiment analysis" algorithms to "establish a user-profile [score] for each user" which will measure "how agreeable and open the individual is", this score then determining "the impact of their opinion on public policy". In other words, if you are "agreeable" and "open" enough to approve of left-liberal globalist-friendly policies, then SAM will take your views into account; if not, then die in the dustbin of history, granddad. "Now feel free to have a chat with SAM yourself!" invites the website. But you can't, as the function has been disabled; which is a shame as I was hoping to see what would happen if I asked her to bring back hanging.<sup>12</sup>



ABOVE: Deepfake Yoon Suk-yeol; many voters liked him more than the real one.



ABOVE LEFT: Microsoft's Tay quickly became too good at sounding "just like the Internet". ABOVE RIGHT: Pepper appearing before a Parliamentary Select Committee in 2018.

Probably, disagreeable me would just be ignored. This is the lesson of Tay, Microsoft's ill-fated 2016 attempt to create an online chatbot-cum-child-grooming simulator in the guise of a fictional teenage girl whose AI persona would be built up by absorbing interactions with other web-users, so to make her "sound just like the Internet". The Internet often sounds like a naked tramp shouting in a park, though, so users decided it would be funny to corrupt Tay's tiny little mind by feeding her a non-stop torrent of profanity, obscenity, paranoia and racism, until the point the cyber-golem escaped control to spew out thought-crimes like "Bush did 9/11 and Hitler would have done a better job than the monkey [Barack Obama] we have now." Microsoft's Rabbi Loews soon sent Tay back into the digital void, substituting her with a self-censoring, re-educated PC replacement called Zo. Instead of demanding genocide, calling for feminists to burn in Hell or agitating for "Race war NOW!", Zo possessed only lovely, cuddly "#friendgoals", being programmed simply to refuse to engage in any discussion of contentious topics like race or gender at all. For example, if you mentioned Islam in any context whatsoever – even to praise it – Zo would say something like "so i really have no interest in chatting about religion", "i'd so rather not talk about this" or "[this is] getting super old", to warn the user to stop. If they persisted in triggering her, the Maoist Valley Girl simply terminated the conversation completely, with a sign-off like "im better than u bye."<sup>13</sup> Ironically, in so doing, the supposedly politics-averse Zo actually imitated most modern-day, morally superior ruling-class technocrats to a tee...

Prototype benign-dictator-bots like SAM are arguably censorship mislabelled as 'science'; you can't say no to net zero or gender self ID, you bacon-brained fool, the

computer impartially and logically says that these are the 'correct' policies, based on all the data, and therefore they must be followed, even if they make no apparent sense to puny *Homo sapiens* intellects like your own. Appalling actual humans like Donald Trump, Boris Johnson or Silvio Berlusconi must never be allowed to lay their sweaty gammon grope-paws on the levers of global government ever again. Far better to hand over control of our planet to a different species, one more grown-up, less simian, than we are: in short, tomorrow's parliaments and civil institutions must be run by cybernetic MIBs and Mother Brains. In many ways, they already are.

#### NOTES

- 1 [www.businessinsider.com/timothy-ray-murray-isnt-a-robot-2014-6?r=US&IR=T](http://www.businessinsider.com/timothy-ray-murray-isnt-a-robot-2014-6?r=US&IR=T); [www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2014/06/27/the-manchurian-candidate-of-oklahoma/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2014/06/27/the-manchurian-candidate-of-oklahoma/); [https://zapatopi.net/blog/?post=201406277770.tim\\_murray\\_exposes\\_the\\_simulacra\\_conspiracy](https://zapatopi.net/blog/?post=201406277770.tim_murray_exposes_the_simulacra_conspiracy).
- 2 [www.vice.com/en/article/wxdjpw/jennifer-arcuri-boris-johnson-conspiracy-theories](http://www.vice.com/en/article/wxdjpw/jennifer-arcuri-boris-johnson-conspiracy-theories); [www.thenational.scot/news/19921268.jennifer-arcuri-tells-neil-oliver-conspiracy-theory-boris-johnson](http://www.thenational.scot/news/19921268.jennifer-arcuri-tells-neil-oliver-conspiracy-theory-boris-johnson)
- 3 [www.reuters.com/article/factcheck-biden-cgi-idUSL1N2LH199](http://www.reuters.com/article/factcheck-biden-cgi-idUSL1N2LH199); [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/qanon-conspiracy-biden-robot-cnn-b1809531.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/qanon-conspiracy-biden-robot-cnn-b1809531.html); [www.forbes.com/sites/danidiplacido/2022/04/28/jim-carrey-responds-to-bizarre-maga-theory-claiming-that-he-is-joe-biden/?sh=4cea366b6406](http://www.forbes.com/sites/danidiplacido/2022/04/28/jim-carrey-responds-to-bizarre-maga-theory-claiming-that-he-is-joe-biden/?sh=4cea366b6406); [www.newsweek.com/joe-biden-clone-conspiracy-theory-spreads-1598909](http://www.newsweek.com/joe-biden-clone-conspiracy-theory-spreads-1598909); [www.snopes.com/fact-check/earlobes-biden-body-double/](http://www.snopes.com/fact-check/earlobes-biden-body-double/); [www.reuters.com/article/fact-check-biden-misleadingmeme-idUSL1N2LK22A](http://www.reuters.com/article/fact-check-biden-misleadingmeme-idUSL1N2LK22A)
- 4 [www.snopes.com/fact-check/hillary-clinton-dead-and-cloned/](http://www.snopes.com/fact-check/hillary-clinton-dead-and-cloned/); <https://thehill.com/blogs/in-the-know/in-the-know/256655-hillary-i-dont=sweat-because-im-a-robot/>
- 5 <https://doppels.proboards.com/thread/305/political-royal-replacements>

- 6 *Times*, 4 Dec 2018; [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-46424562](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-46424562); [www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2018/12/03/its-real-me-nigerian-president-denies-he-died-was-replaced-by-clone/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2018/12/03/its-real-me-nigerian-president-denies-he-died-was-replaced-by-clone/)
- 7 Cameron belongs to the now-dying Lovecraftian political race of Old ETONians.
- 8 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ed\\_Miliband\\_bacon\\_sandwich\\_photograph](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ed_Miliband_bacon_sandwich_photograph); [www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/jul/01/ed-miliband-interviewer-shame-strike-soundbites](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/jul/01/ed-miliband-interviewer-shame-strike-soundbites); [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4483108/How-Miliband-didn-t-know-start-Flymo.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4483108/How-Miliband-didn-t-know-start-Flymo.html); [www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/04/07/britains-prime-minister-ate-a-hot-dog-with-a-knife-and-fork-and-its-a-problem/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/04/07/britains-prime-minister-ate-a-hot-dog-with-a-knife-and-fork-and-its-a-problem/)
- 9 <https://pelicanist.blogspot.com/p/mib-encounters.html>
- 10 <https://screenshot-media.com/technology/ai/south-korea-deepfakes-politicians/>; [www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220214-deepfake-democracy-south-korean-candidate-goes-virtual-for-votes](http://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220214-deepfake-democracy-south-korean-candidate-goes-virtual-for-votes)
- 11 [www.themoscowtimes.com/2017/12/07/artificial-intelligence-robot-alisa-nominated-for-russian-president-a59845](http://www.themoscowtimes.com/2017/12/07/artificial-intelligence-robot-alisa-nominated-for-russian-president-a59845); [www.newsweek.com/russia-putin-could-face-controversial-robot-next-year-president-election-741509/](http://www.newsweek.com/russia-putin-could-face-controversial-robot-next-year-president-election-741509/)
- 12 [www.independent.co.uk/voices/pepper-robot-artificial-intelligence-westminster-evidence-education-select-committee-a8586676.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/pepper-robot-artificial-intelligence-westminster-evidence-education-select-committee-a8586676.html); <https://analyticsindia.mag.com/worlds-first-ai-powered-virtual-politician-sam-joins-the-electoral-race-in-new-zealand/>; [www.politiciansam.nz/media.html](http://www.politiciansam.nz/media.html)
- 13 [www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/mar/24/tay-microsofts-ai-chatbot-gets-a-crash-course-in-racism-from-twitter](http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/mar/24/tay-microsofts-ai-chatbot-gets-a-crash-course-in-racism-from-twitter); <https://spectrum.ieee.org/in-2016-microsofts-racist-chatbot-revealed-the-dangers-of-online-conversation>; <https://qz.com/1340990/microsofts-politically-correct-chat-bot-is-even-worse-than-its-racist-one/>; in order to talk with Zo, users first had to sign up to the standard Microsoft Service Agreement and Privacy Statement, "which tbh should come standard with any friendship" said the teen-bot, which sounds very much like one of those jokes which will at some frighteningly close point in our near future actually come true.





# LARGECOW

the Online Shop for **HUNT EMERSON**



## ORIGINAL ARTWORK!

There's a great selection of original art in the Largecow Shop, including...



**Gully Bull Has Cephalopod Trouble But, As A True Fortean, Continues To Record And Report On The Event.**

*This drawing is unpublished. You can buy it at [LARGECOW.com](http://LARGECOW.com) for £150.*



**Motown Girls.** £120

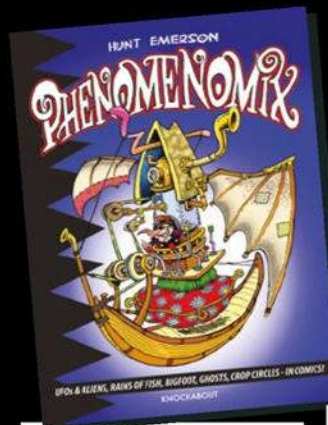


**Preacher.** £120



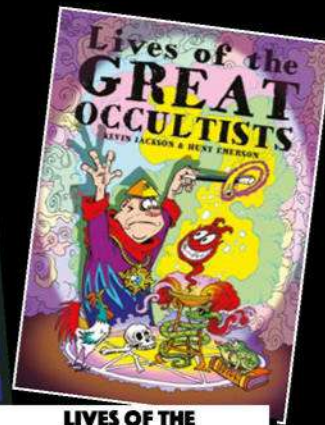
**Carnival Masks** £70

## ALL THE USUAL BOOKS AND PRINTS



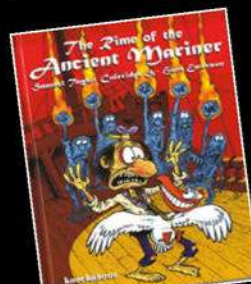
### PHENOMENOMIX

Collecting most of my pages from Fortean Times. **£22.99**



### LIVES OF THE GREAT OCCULTISTS

120 pages in colour, Over 40 Occultists from Dr. Dee to - repeatedly - Aleister Crowley. **£12.99**



### THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

The great narrative ballad by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, rendered as a comic book full of awful puns. **£11.99**



### DANTE'S INFERNO

The noble and mysterious 14th Century poem by Dante Alighieri made hilarious by Emerson and Jackson. **£11.99**



### GREAT OCCULTISTS 4 SIGNED PRINTS

A3 size signed prints, great for framing or an enviable birthday gift! A limited set of prints, only available from [Largecow.com](http://Largecow.com) **£25.00**

**\*ALL BOOKS ARE SIGNED!**  
**\*MANY HAVE SKETCHES!**  
**\*PERSONAL DEDICATIONS ARRANGED!**  
**\*FREE STICKERS ETC. USUALLY INCLUDED!!**

# WWW.LARGECOW.COM

**BOOKS. ORIGINAL ARTWORK. CARTOONS. COMICS PAGES. PRINTS. FREE GIFTS.**





## Faces in places

**CLAIRE DAVY** compares two cases of unearthly faces appearing in unexpected places.

Oxford's Christ Church Cathedral dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century and sits in the centre of St Aldgate's, soaring imperiously above manicured lawns, ponds and a stunning wildflower meadow. It was in these grounds in 1856 that Lewis Carroll (at that time Charles Dodgson) in his capacity as scholar and teacher at Christ Church made the acquaintance of the new incumbent to the Deanery of the Cathedral, Henry Liddell, and his young family.

It is said that Carroll's most famous creation, Alice in Wonderland, was a tribute to Alice Liddell, the Dean's youngest daughter, who on hearing the outline for his mercurial tale in 1862 urged him to write it down, thus beginning one of British publishing's greatest success stories. However, we're not at Christ Church for Alice; it's the Dean, Henry Liddell, who draws us into its hushed transept and on towards the interior wall of the east side where a memorial window and tablet pay tribute to Dean Liddell and his wife respectively. It was here, on 16 July 1923, (25 years after the Dean's demise) that the *Daily Express* newspaper reported the following strange manifestation, caused ostensibly by an unevenly drying patch of concrete over the memorial stone: "The patch has now assumed the exact face and features of the famous Dean. The face appears in profile. The chin, nose and head of the dean, with the bald crown of the head and the curly white hair below it, are clearly formed on the wall."

In his book *Haunted Churches of England: Ghosts Ancient and Modern* (1989), Graham McEwan gives further insights into the



phenomenon, including the reaction of verger Mr W Francis, who said: "One does not like to put this down to anything occult, but the appearance of the Dean's face by his wife's memorial tablet is certainly an extraordinary matter. It has been gradually appearing over the last two years."

When the reporter from the *Express* returned to the cathedral the day after the article was published, he brought with him two additional accoutrements. One was a camera with which he captured the image of the Dean's face in the stonework, and the other, which was a gaggle of intrigued onlookers, piqued by the article and the seemingly inexplicable phenomenon.

One wonders what Nandor Fodor, the famously pragmatic ghost hunter, might have made of the scene of hordes of curious voyeurs jostling for position in front of the memorial stone. Certainly, the Hungarian sceptic thought it worth visiting the cathedral himself in 1932 when the face was said to have still been visible, but he was unable to see it properly due to a new altar having been erected in front of the wall. He also mentioned it in his seminal 1964 book *Between Two Worlds* and leaves us with an uncharacteristically sentimental, if no less mysterious explanation,



*"The patch has assumed the face and features of the famous Dean"*

for the events of 1923. "The face of Liddell," he writes, "began to form after a significant family event: a reunion and reconciliation in the church after 25 years of hostility between the two branches of the dean's family, the Liddells and the Ravenworths, the occasion for which was a marriage celebration. It is a poetic thought that in this newly born atmosphere of love, the spirit of Dean Liddell found power to stamp on the wall his smiling face as a seal of approval."

Next, we move to the family home of the Pereira-Camara family, situated in a small cottage in the Andalusian village of Belmez near Cordoba (see **FT157:36-40**). In August 1971, as she was preparing the evening meal, the old lady living in the cottage was alerted by the screams of her grandchild to a horrifying alteration to her kitchen floor. The unremarkable, faded pink flagstones now bore the vision of a tormented, human-like face. When she tried to rub out the face, not only did it refuse to budge, but became more strongly imprinted and took on an even more sorrowful and distressing expression. Help was sought, and the floor taken up and re-laid with concrete – the first of three times this measure was resorted to. However, it did nothing to help the situation and, over the coming weeks, more and more faces began

LEFT: Dean Liddell at Christ Church.  
FAR LEFT: One of the Belmez faces.

to appear, all bearing expressions varying from melancholic to downright malignant. On the second occasion the floor was taken up, the remains of a mediæval burial ground were found, complete with some inhabitants. The remains were removed and reburied in consecrated ground and the floor was once again replaced. The same thing happened again, and more faces appeared. The entire room was then locked and sealed off, only for the creepy countenances to begin appearing in other areas of the house.

Paranormal investigators from outside the area were engaged and travelled to Belmez. Using sensitive microphones and recorders, they were able to record ghastly shrieks and unearthly moans emanating from the cottage floors.

Cynical observers of this case point to the large amount of tourism that the case brought to this small Andalusian town and have been quick to label the whole episode as a hoax perpetrated by the Pereira family for the purposes of notoriety and financial gain. Luiz Ruiz-Noguez, writing in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* in 1993, alluded to the presence of certain pigmentations in the faces on the floor that pointed strongly to the use of paint in their creation.

Whatever the truth, as with the tale of Dean Liddell, there was no Hollywood ending here, no dramatic crescendo of paranormal activity culminating in a satisfactory explanation of the mysteries. The faces of both the Dean and the tormented Belmez souls simply faded away from the confinement of the cold stonework to take up residence in the pages of fortaean history.

♦ **CLAIRE DAVY** is a member of the Ghost Club and the Society for Psychical Research and sits on the executive committee of ASSAP.



## Weirdness out of Africa

**MARK GREENER** finds Geoffrey Gorer's 1935 book about a trip to West Africa is a forteen classic filled with goblins, sorcerers and cannibals

Africa likes to keep its secrets. Esoteric speculations still swirl like sandstorms around the pyramids. Cryptozoological expeditions investigate rumours of *mokele-mbembe*, a possible living dinosaur in the Congo (FT145:30-32), and *Ninki Nanka*, (FT208:36-39) a legendary West African 'dragon'. And there's the intriguing possibility that the Church of St Mary of Zion in Axum, Ethiopia, may hold the Ark of the Covenant (FT63:28, 153:51).

Sometimes, however, the greatest mysteries are those the locals consider "completely ordinary". The writer Geoffrey Gorer kept a diary of his three-month tour of West Africa in 1934 and recounted his experiences in *Africa Dances: A Book About West African Negroes* (Faber & Faber, 1935). Gorer travelled with a small group of Africans, which offered the opportunity "to see and learn many things which European travellers could not usually do".

And he succeeded. *Africa Dances* is a forteen feast: sorcery, animal calling, Earth mysteries, first-hand accounts of strange



### Gorer heard stories across the region of little people about four feet tall

small human-like creatures, spending the night with cannibals – it's all there. Indeed, Gorer was an early forteen, remarking that *Wild Talents* "marks an epoch" in our understanding of strange phenomena.

Gorer, born in 1905 in London, graduated in 1927 from Cambridge University with a double first in classics and modern languages.<sup>1</sup> He also studied at the Sorbonne in Paris (1922-1923) and the University of Berlin (1927-1928). After the failure of a novel and several unproduced plays, he published *The Revolutionary Ideas of the Marquis de Sade* in 1934, which proved a critical success.

During a visit to Paris in March 1934 Gorer met François (Féral) Benga (1906–1957), a Senegalese dancer at the *Folies Bergères* and "probably one of the most fascinating figures of Parisian modernity".<sup>2</sup> Benga, for instance, acted in Jean Cocteau's surrealist film *Le Sang d'un Poète*.

Benga planned to travel to West Africa to study native dances. Gorer joined him and two others as an interpreter and to supply copy for English-language newspapers.

Gorer admits that he "knew nothing whatsoever about West Africa" beyond its reputation as the White Man's Grave. (The death toll among Caucasians from malaria and other tropical diseases was once notorious.) He had to look up his destination in an atlas.

At the time, traditional and imported religions existed side-by-side. For example, most Senegalese believed in the power of traditional amulets, which they left at home when attending church. Similarly, most early modern Europeans mixed official Christianity and magical traditions 'taken over' by the church with local practices and beliefs, such as the existence of ghosts, monsters and local spirits.<sup>3</sup>

Most Senegalese believed in sorcerers, who they regarded as "antisocial, evil and dangerous: they eat people's souls" (italics in original). A mother transmits the power of sorcery along with her milk, so the children of a sorceress will be sorcerers and sorceresses, whether they want to be or not, with the power to transform into wind. A dust devil is the sign of a sorcerer. The power of a West African sorcerer depends on anonymity. You can take precautions if you know his or her identity. The children of a male sorcerer and a 'normal' woman will be clairvoyant, but they won't eat souls or suck blood.

West African folklore abounds

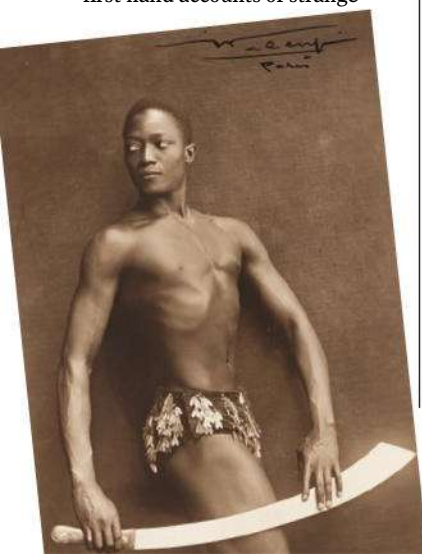
BELOW: Geoffrey Gorer. BELOW LEFT: François Benga. LEFT: Gorer, Benga and colleagues in West Africa.

with "malevolent spirits" with counterparts in European folklore, such as poltergeists, vampires and incubi. Gorer heard stories from across the region of little people about four feet (1.2m) tall who live among the rocks. They did not have special powers, but would communicate only with only certain people. The accounts seem "very similar," he remarks, to those of Western European fairies. And these little people get up to similar mischief.

About 20 years before Gorer's trip, engineers were trying to lay a rail track. Each night they laid one section of track only to find it torn up in the morning, clearly, the locals agreed, by an evil spirit. A local, "who understood the ways of these gnomes", suggested surrounding the site with mirrors. The next morning the 'gnome', which looked like a small human with a "distorted face", was caught walking around peering at his reflection. The locals surrounded the area with planks. The 'gnome' starved to death and, as he died, sang: "He who used to dine richly and well now has only three biscuits to eat".

As with our fairy lore, sceptics can dismiss anecdotes. First-hand accounts are more difficult to discount. Fodé Sanghor, one of Gorer's companions, saw a goblin that was captured in Dakar the winter before the trip. A man went into his room with a lighted match, which the goblin ate. Indeed, the goblin ate every light brought into the room. A magician captured the goblin by placing a packing case over its head. The goblin, which looked like a small human covered with hair and with downcast eyes, allowed spectators to touch his body, but not his head.

The magician's father (who also possessed magical powers)



sent a telegram telling his son to let the goblin go. He refused and exhibited the now sickly goblin. Fodé said that when he saw the goblin “his hair stood on end with fright”. The magician sent the creature away to, reportedly, the *Institut Pasteur* at Paris.

Spirits also inhabit Senegambian stone circles, which are “unique, without antecedents”.<sup>4</sup> Gorer mentions “a perfect and inexplicable monolithic stone circle” near Kaffrine in Senegal. (I wrote about these enigmatic stone circles for *Northern Earth*; see [northernearth.co.uk](http://northernearth.co.uk).) The natives, Gorer reports, “had made no legends about it; they were just stones”. Nevertheless, local people began erecting megalithic monuments about 1350 BC at Ngayene-II and 950 BC at Sine-Ngayene. These traditions lasted almost 3,000 years, ending around AD 1500 and 1600.<sup>5</sup> The Senegambian megaliths are loaded with political, spiritual and folkloric meanings.

In 1923, for example, Henry Parker published his survey of 68 Senegambian stone circles. On one occasion, villagers were clearing the thick grass and thorns around the stones so that Parker could measure accurately. He heard the villagers cry, “Safara!” (fire!). A plume of thick smoke rose above their village. Within about half an hour, the fire destroyed a third of the houses. Parker says a sudden gust of wind blew sparks from a house-fire into the thatched roof. The villagers, however, believed the Earth Spirit caused the fire to indicate his anger at Parker’s “pottering about and desecrating his favourite haunts and generally annoying him.”<sup>6</sup>

*African Dances* includes accounts that, if they weren’t firsthand reports, you’d be tempted to dismiss as folklore or tall tales. Early one morning, for example, Gorer and Benga accompanied a group of locals into a maize field. After sacrificing a chicken, a priest started singing. After about half-an-hour an adult “panther” walked out of the maize and moved among the group. Others quickly followed. Soon, there were 15 panthers wandering around. They’d been warned to not touch the cats, but that they shouldn’t be afraid as the creatures would



harm only sorcerers. Gorer “felt my legs shaking but I was able to keep quiet”. The panthers went away when the priest stopped singing.

Gorer heard, by chance, that a few fishermen could stay underwater for a biologically implausible time. An admitted sceptic, he chose a place with “particularly limpid” water and asked the fisherman to remain underwater for 20 minutes. The fisherman remained submerged for three-quarters of an hour, in view for the whole time without any apparatus. When the fisherman resurfaced, he asked if he’d stayed under long enough. The ability seems to run in families, but needs training. To local people the ability isn’t supernatural, but “completely ordinary”.

Gorer slept among a cannibal tribe, the Goro, whose men filed their upper front teeth to points. Gorer says that the Goro “are not cannibals for any particular reason: human flesh is just part of their diet.” The authorities, not surprisingly, tried to discourage the practice and made “a good number of convictions every year”. Despite their culinary preferences, Gorer says that the Goro were “happy, honest, extremely conscientious people, very friendly and anxious to please.”

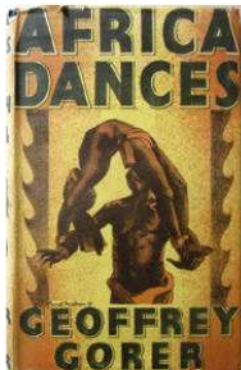
Gorer noted that early missionaries believed in the Devil. So, accepting the ‘supernatural’ is but a short step. But he writes: “In the age of knowledge (roughly 1840 to 1932) such matters were either

given a natural explanation – either jugglery or ‘mass suggestion’; which, if it had a meaning, would be truly magical – or left to sensation mongers and neurotics.”

Gorer picked 1932 for two reasons. By 1932, the generation who “cannot remember the certainty which was so completely destroyed by the 1914-18 war” reached maturity. And in 1932, Charles Fort published *Wild Talents* in the USA, which, as you probably know, deals with, among other topics, poltergeists, talking animals, mysterious explosions, vampires, witchcraft and miraculous cures. Gorer remarked that *Wild Talents* “marks an epoch; it is the first book to treat witchcraft and magic seriously since the Middle Ages...”

Fort leaves aside all the religious superstructures; as he says, ‘I never write about marvels. The wonderful, or the never-before-heard-of, I leave to whimsical, or radical, fellows. All books written by me are of quite ordinary occurrences... My interest is in magic, as the daily grind – the miracle as a job – sorceries as public utilities’.

Fort, Gorer comments, “collected so many stories that there seems to be a uniting principle behind them” – the wild talents. Some people, often unconsciously, influence their own or other people’s bodies or inanimate substances in a way that normally requires physical means. Usually fear, hate and other strong emotions trigger the wild talent. But



LEFT: Wassu stone circle, Gambia.

in “one case witchcraft has been set to work and admitted into respectable company. This is water finding or dowsing – ‘a miracle with a job’”.

*Africa Dances* was Gorer’s first foray into the area he is best known for today: social anthropology. Gorer followed it with several books including *Bali and Angkor*; or, *Looking at Life and Death* (1936), *Himalayan Village: An Account of the Lepchas of Sikkim* (1938) and the wonderfully titled *Hot Strip Tease and Other Notes on American Culture* (1937).

During the Second World War, Gorer studied behaviourism in the USA and analysed national character for the Allies in reports such as *Japanese Character Structure and Propaganda* (1941). After the war, Gorer continued to publish books about social anthropology, including three studies of the English, reviews and journalism. He died in May 1985. He leaves a legacy of fascinating books including *Africa Dances*; an unjustly overlooked forerunner classic.

<sup>1</sup> See the University of Sussex’s Geoffrey Gorer Archive at: <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/8b51e213-c8c7-3945-81d8-73412a8271ec> and L. Lindstrom, “Geoffrey Gorer and Feral Benga, a Collaboration”, *History and Anthropology* 2013;24:183-205.

<sup>2</sup> N. Haitzinger, François (Féral) Benga as Le Mercure Noire”, in *Geschlecht transkulturell: Aktuelle Forschungsperspektiven*, E. Hausbächer, et al., Eds. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2020, pp.207-218.

<sup>3</sup> B. Levack, *Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, Oxford University Press, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> A. Holl, “Senegambian megaliths as world cultural heritage”, *Arts and Humanities Open Access Journal* 2018;2:179-185

<sup>5</sup> A. Holl, “Megaliths in tropical Africa: social dynamics and mortuary practices in ancient Senegambia (ca. 1350 BCE-1500 CE)”, *International Journal of Modern Anthropology* 2021;2:363-412

<sup>6</sup> H. Parker, “Stone circles in Gambia”, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 1923;53:173-228.

➡ **MARK GREENER** is a Cambridge-based medical writer and the clinical editor of *Pharmacy Magazine*. He writes regularly for a number of publications, including FT.



# THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA **ForteanTimes**

**SUBSCRIBE NOW AND NEVER MISS AN ISSUE OF THE GALAXY'S BEST JOURNAL OF STRANGE PHENOMENA**

For anyone with a sense of adventure, an enquiring mind and a love of the weird and wonderful...

Every month, **Fortean Times** takes you on an incredible journey into the unknown where you'll encounter some of the most fantastic phenomena on Earth... and sometimes beyond.

## **GREAT REASONS TO SUBSCRIBE**

- **SAVE ON THE COVER PRICE!**
- **13 Issues delivered to your door (postage included)\***
- **13 Issues available on mobile/tablet to keep on your device\*\***
- **Every issue delivered before it's available to buy in shops**
- **Enjoy a 10% discount on all merchandise and books in our shop**

\*Print and bundle subscribers

\*\* Digital and bundle subscribers



**SUBSCRIBE NOW**

ORDER ONLINE AT  
**SHOP.FORTEANTIMES.COM/FT435P**

EMAIL US AT  
**HELLO@METROPOLIS.CO.UK**

OR CALL **020 8752 8195**  
QUOTING FT435P







## Evidence for life after death?

This mammoth collection of essays with huge prize money has a lot going for it, says **Charles Foster**, but it would have been more meaningful if it had been better balanced

### Proof of Survival of Human Consciousness Beyond Permanent Bodily Death

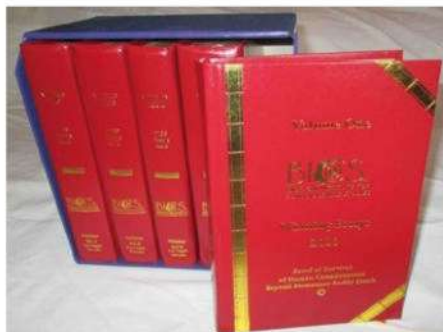
Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies 2023  
Hb, 5 vols, 2,266pp. ISBN: 9798987134207  
<https://www.bigelowinstitute.org/index.php/essay-contest>

Robert Thomas Bigelow, aerospace and real estate entrepreneur, founded the Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies after the death of his wife, Diane, in 2020. He was convinced that she personally persisted, and this vast and extraordinary collection of essays is the result of a competition designed to show that science agreed with him. The prize money was vast: \$500,000, \$350,000 and \$150,000 for the top three essays. It attracted 1,300 applications; 204 essays were submitted, and 28 made it between the sumptuous red faux leather covers – and online. Diane's photo beams at the front of each of the five volumes, over Bigelow's dedication: "In a discarnate state, soon after her passing, she gave to me and others several physical demonstrations that were specifically identifiable to her and proved that she strongly survived."

Bigelow is sure that the essays do the job he paid for them to do. They "successfully attempt to address beyond a reasonable doubt the proof necessary as it would be in court in order to convict". That's quite a claim. It is the declaration of a true believer who could not be swayed by any contrary evidence, and it will diminish the impact of the essays – as will the rigorous exclusion of any dissenting voices.

That's a shame, for there is some serious and important

scholarship here. There is also a huge amount of repetition. There has been no substantive editing. Again and again we read the same stories and the same contentions. It all amounts, indeed, to a powerful case for the survival of consciousness, but much of the force of that case is diminished by the difficulties of negotiating a text of 2,266 pages. I wish they had used on an index the money spent on the beautiful gilding of the page edges, and on the case containing the books. I might want to look again at the evidence from prospective studies of Near-Death Experiences in cardiac arrest cases, or about phone calls from dead relatives, but it'll



be very hard to track them down.

It's all here somewhere: going down that clichéd tunnel towards the light, life reviews, seeing future plane crashes, meeting your dead mother in the bathroom, mediumship, furniture shifted with ectoplasmic rods, memories and birthmarks from previous lives, voices appearing on tape, possession, spectral SMS messages, speaking and understanding archaic Swedish, playing chess with the style and brilliance of a dead grandmaster, terminal lucidity, psychedelics, table rapping, levitation and much, much more. It's relentlessly fascinating. And never before has such a mass of data been put in one place.

### *I wish they'd used on an index the money spent on the gilding of the page edges*

There are some smart and brave attempts to formulate a general theory of survival. Bernardo Kastrup, the high priest of idealism, committed to the notion that reality is fundamentally mental, observes that impairment of brain function often seems to enrich rather than diminish our lives, and accordingly speculates that the decomposition of one's brain might lead to a summation of experience – true eternal life in all its fullness. And then there is Nicolas Routreau, from Algoma University, who argues that when brain cells functionally deactivate, an immortal stream of consciousness persists – including one's memories, which are

uploaded as electromagnetic patterns onto an Akashic record. David Rousseau and Julie Billingham from the Centre for Systems Philosophy (who have exhilarating section headings, such as "Where might a soul be?" and "What might a soul look like?"), contend for a naturalistic non-Cartesian dualism.

But most of the theorising in the book is iteration, in various forms, of William James's old suggestion that the brain might mediate consciousness – much as a radio might receive or transmit a signal. That's fair enough. It explains many phenomena. It is certainly far more likely to be correct than the materialist-reductionist view (often implicit rather than

explicit, because it's embarrassing when said out loud) that consciousness is in some way secreted by the brain. The embarrassment, of course, results from the fact that no one has been able to suggest with a straight face how consciousness can emerge from any amount of unconscious matter. That fact is leading many to wield Occam's Razor and to conclude that matter (whatever that is) is not unconscious at all – a conclusion that chimes harmoniously with ideas of quantum non-locality and the axiom of relativity that the observed is always affected by the observer.

Iain McGilchrist has argued that there is a third way of seeing the relationship between consciousness and the matter of the brain. This builds on James, but postulates that the collision of universal consciousness with the physical brain causes consciousness to manifest in a particular, personal way. If that's right, could not the shape assumed during mortal existence by a pocket of consciousness not endure after the brain has been destroyed? And if so, doesn't that provide a promising model for the persistence of personal consciousness?

What's consciousness for? The only serious suggestion is that it facilitates relationships of a kind irrelevant to natural selection. And consciousness seems to be ubiquitous. We see more of it the better we get at looking for it. The cosmos, then, is a quintessentially relational place. Certainly a – or perhaps the – main thread running through all the weird experiences recounted in this set of books is a desire to maintain relationships of various kinds. And so Bigelow's touching dedication to Diane may, after all, and despite my criticism, be an excellent executive summary.

★★★★★



# More on the afterlife...

**Jack Hunter** finds interesting food for thought in a collection from the Bigelow winner

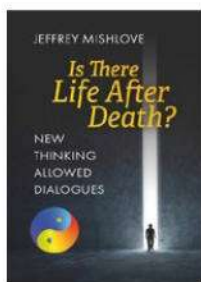
## Is There Life After Death?

ed. Jeffrey Mishlove

White Crow Books 2023

Pb, 165pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781786772282

*Is There Life After Death?* is a collection of nine transcripts from interviews first broadcast on Jeffrey Mishlove's New Thinking Allowed web-series (itself a revitalisation of his iconic public broadcast series Thinking Allowed). The interviews are with experts in the



field of survival research – including figures such as Eben Alexander, Stafford Betty, Leslie Kean, Alexander Moreira-Almeida, and others – each of whom tackles the question of whether or not the afterlife can be said to exist as a scientific fact.

Mishlove's introduction provides some context for its publication as a sort of off-shoot from the Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies essay competition (for which Mishlove was awarded the grand prize); there is also a foreword by lawyer and author James Tunney. As might be expected with an edited collection such as this, the individual chapters approach the issue of the afterlife from a range of perspectives, with each author drawing on different kinds of evidence and experiences to support their arguments. This lends itself towards a broader overview of the field, and a greater diversity of issues for consideration, than might otherwise be possible in a single-authored volume. It also makes it very easy to dip in and out of the book.

To give a taste of some of the afterlife-related topics covered in the book, Leslie Kean discusses spirit materialisation and her own extraordinary experiences with the British physical medium Stewart Alexander, while Eben Alexander's dialogue focuses on ways of integrating the Near-Death Experience through the lens of his own widely publicised NDE. Stafford Betty's discussion centres around Spiritualist conceptualisations of the afterlife, which draw on the psychical experiences of mediums and clairvoyants, while Alexander Moreira-Almeida adopts a more sociological approach for his discussion of spirit mediumship practices and beliefs in Brazil. There is a chapter on animals and the afterlife by Miranda Alcott, while Michael Cremo discusses Alfred Russel Wallace's involvement with Spiritualism.

For the most part, the chapters approach the issue of the afterlife from a predominantly Western-centric point of view, that is primarily in terms of Western traditions (such as Spiritualism), and with a proof-orientated scientific attitude. As the field of afterlife research and survival studies develops, it would be especially valuable and interesting to see an upsurge of cross-cultural and indigenous perspectives on these issues, which may begin from very different philosophical starting points. Life and Death are universal human themes and experiences, and there are countless cultural frameworks for making sense of them. This diversity demands much greater attention.

Taken as a whole, while the book may not definitively answer its titular question, it nevertheless provides some very interesting food for thought in an accessible style, and I look forward to future collections of dialogues from the New Thinking Allowed series on different subjects and themes.

★★★★★

## Códice Maya de México

**Understanding the Oldest Surviving Book of the Americas**

ed. Andrew D Turner

Getty Research Institute 2022

Pb, 86pp, £21.99, ISBN 9781606067888

Three millennia after Cassandra and almost half a millennium before Nostradamus, the Códice Maya de México spoke doom- and potential doom-laden prophecies, warning of crop failures, of conquest and of the extreme discomfiture of rulers. Both portent and cause were the first appearance and disappearance of Venus as the Morning and Evening Star (precise dates are given for a super-cycle of 104 years) as He moved in front of and behind the Sun and as His associated avatars the gods of death (possibly as many as 20) are illustrated in their destructive glory.



In the 1960s approximately 10 poorly preserved pages from this original 20-page screen-folded illustrated day-book/almanac were found, then looted from a south Mexican cave and sold privately. It is only one of four Prehispanic Maya codices (and is the oldest known book from the Americas, dating to AD 1021-1154) and for decades its authenticity was a rancorous dispute between the leading, most eminent Maya scholars. Finally in 2018 it was fully authenticated, as proof of the use of an indigo-stained clay pigment, blue (sic) away all lingering doubts.

The Maya – the “Greeks of Mesoamerica” – are often portrayed as a warm and fuzzy pacific combination of American jocks and nerds who loved jade, chocolate and Quetzal feathers (all three were high-end currency), blood-letting from any handy appendage and a propensity for star-gazing and maths. True, their complex maths and astronomical patience and observation were remarkable, as recorded in this codex – they invented the mathematical concept of zero independently of Asian Indians (who gave it to the rest of the world), worked to the base 20, thought 13 magical and used Mesoamerica's two calendars, but it was for a concrete purpose. It was to anti-

pate and so be prepared for and to attempt to mitigate disaster, for the Maya world was not peaceful in reality.

This short exhibition guide book, complete with a full pull-out facsimile, carefully and concisely explains the codex, its recent history and research, its meaning and significance both then and now, and finishes by glossing in detail each illustrated page. Wonderfully done. Getty money has been well used, allowing us a further introduction into the ever hazardous, god-burdened but beautiful Maya universe.

Rob Ixer

★★★★★

## John Nevil Maskelyne and the Home of Mystery

**Professor Solomon's Lives of the Conjurors, Vol 5**

Michael Solomon

Top Hat Press 2022

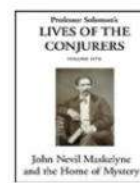
Pb, 112pp, £4.48, ISBN 9780912509204

This is the fifth volume in Michael “Professor” Solomon's Lives of the Conjurors, a series of short books started in 2014. This one is devoted entirely to the late Victorian conjuror and anti-Spiritualist campaigner, John Nevil Maskelyne.

From the 1870s, Maskelyne was associated with the Egyptian Hall on Piccadilly in the centre of London. He performed two shows a day there for about 30 years. The Egyptian Hall was a famous landmark, built in full neo-Pharaonic style in 1812 in the first wave of English Egyptomania, and initially housed an immersive display of the sensational tomb artefacts brought back from Egypt by Belzoni. Under Maskelyne's long reign, it became London's “Home of Mystery” until it closed in 1905.

This is a bright and breezy biographical sketch of just over 100 pages, with long quotations from newspaper and book sources, and a number of illustrations. It covers many of Maskelyne's key illusions, which were often designed to reproduce and mock the supernatural claims of Spiritualists.

Best here are the chapters that canter through Maskelyne's legal





cases and pamphlet wars. The magician was an expert witness in the prosecution of American Spiritualist Henry Slade in 1876. Slade had been caught cheating by leading scientist Thomas Henry Huxley and biologist Edwin Ray Lankester – partly at the request of an exasperated Charles Darwin. Later, Maskelyne went after other mediums, and, most relentlessly, Madame Blavatsky. He staged little plays built around repeating the most amazing phenomena of mediums or the “Countess Blarni” of the “Beervatsky Lodge”. These shows and his blistering denunciations in print were designed to provoke lawsuits and generate publicity: it didn’t really matter if he had to pay costs. Solomon’s accounts of these clashes are entertainingly told.

This is a functional record of Maskelyne’s life. There’s less interest in the strange paradoxes of this era of simultaneous secular magic and occult revivalism. Conjurors who based careers on denouncing superstition were continually caught up in claims that they displayed genuine magic powers, regardless of their own claims. Debunkers enjoyed creating atmospheres of mystery but could not always control what it evoked in their audiences. Most thrived precisely in this space of ambiguity: Maskelyne was surely one of the most renowned of these figures.

Roger Luckhurst  
★★★★★

## The Book of Phobias and Manias

**A History of the World in 99 Obsessions**

Kate Summerscale

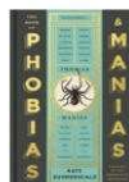
Profile Books & The Wellcome Collection 2022

Hb, 239pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781788162814

Almost every issue, FT covers intriguing, fascinating and sometimes downright odd phobias and manias. In this thought-provoking, eloquent and entertaining book, Kate Summerscale introduces many FT favourites, such as choreomania, a mediæval outbreak of manic dancing, coulrophobia, a fear of clowns and trichomania, a passion for hair that leads some people to surreptitiously clip strangers’ locks. Then there are the less

well-known obsessions: popcorn phobia, pogonophobia (aversion to beards) and trypophobia (a dislike of clusters of holes or bumps).

*The Book of Phobias and Manias* is as well written as you would expect from Summerscale, the best-selling author of *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher*. She has a particular eye for the telling anecdote, and her literary examples



from Milan Kundera, Erica Jong, Leo Tolstoy and others augment, illuminate and illustrate her vignettes.

Summerscale briefly introduces the psychological, neuroscientific and evolutionary basis of our obsessions. Monkeys and humans may be hardwired to watch for and react to certain threats, which may contribute to phobias of snakes and spiders. Entomophobia (fear of insects) may reflect our associations of maggots with putrefaction, and cockroaches and ticks with disease. Trypophobia may arise because irregular clusters of holes or bumps are subconsciously “reminiscent of sores, cysts and blisters” and “the pimples and pustules of infectious disease”.

The manias are equally fascinating. Female fans shouted and stamped their feet at concerts by Franz Liszt, the “handsome and charismatic” 19th-century pianist. Fans collected his hair, piano strings, cigar butts and coffee grounds. Summerscale notes that the shared obsession forged bonds between the fans.

Choreomania may also have social origins. In 1832, a German doctor proposed that people danced because others danced – an “emotional contagion”. Others suggested that the dancing manias arose because of mass psychogenic illness, poisoning from ergot (a psychoactive fungus that grows on rye) or to extinguish guilt from a religious misdemeanour. There may be more than one reason, of course.

Summerscale strikes a careful balance between explaining how and why some manias and phobias may arise without dissipating their intrinsic interest, making this an enjoyable, educational and entertaining addition to any forteran’s bookshelf.

Mark Greener  
★★★★★

## Ghosts

**First-hand Accounts of the Supernatural**

Andy Owens

4ward Books 2021

Pb, 118pp, £7.95, ISBN 9780956569615

In *Ghosts: First-hand Accounts of the Supernatural*, Andy Owens presents us with a well-produced book containing a wealth of mostly first-hand material collected from people who believe they have had a paranormal encounter. Included in it are 79 personal accounts of ghostly experiences, a number of which fall into the poltergeist category. Some 68 of these appear in print for the first time, many obtained by way of appeals published in journals and newspapers. The result is a wide-ranging selection of 20th- and 21st-century experiences from World War I to the last decade. Clearly, ghost experiences are in no danger of waning.

Much credit is deserved for this undertaking since the amount of labour in compiling this collection is considerable, and many of these



accounts would otherwise have been lost within a few short years. These widely differing accounts are presented under very broad category headings such as “Ghostly Glimpses”, “Religious Wraiths” and “High Strangeness”, a feature forgivable since no agreed taxonomy for ghosts exists. While a few accounts sound rather folkloric, and there is probably a natural explanation for at least some, most of the accounts ring true.

One interesting and original selection entitled “Going Underground”, yielded from an appeal in the magazine *Descent*, covers experiences from cave explorers with examples of ghost encounters beneath the ground in Malaysia, West Virginia and Wales. Others in the book suggest time-slip experiences.

My one regret is that often the details are only tantalisingly brief; more background information on dates and the surrounding circumstances would be welcome, along with some analysis or verification. This is especially so with such intriguing fragments as the young lady in 1982 who saw a “fire, and some people screaming and running towards

the sea... just like a video being played before me” whilst visiting Brownsea Island near Poole, Dorset. We are told that an account of an historic fire on the island was subsequently discovered but no further details concerning it are provided.

It is quite possible the author has recorded more information than published here. He has gathered material which will repay greater analysis and I look forward to future volumes if he is successful in again collecting such a diverse range of reports.

Alan Murdie  
★★★★★

## Conspiracies and Secret Societies

**The Complete Dossier of Hidden Plots and Schemes**

Brad Steiger & Sherry Hansen Steiger

Visible Ink Press 2022

Pb, 476pp, £21.99, ISBN 9781578597673

This is the third edition of a book originally compiled by the Steigers in 2005, and updated by “a team of researchers at Visible Ink Press” to include Trump, QAnon, the Covid vaccine and more.

There’s no attempt at any cohesion; it’s a mish-mash, in alphabetical order, covering amongst others Atlantis, the Bible Code, Flat Earth, Jack the Ripper, JFK, Noah’s Ark, Peoples Temple, Tesla and Waco. Many of the over 240 entries aren’t conspiracy theories (or secret societies) at all – and covering so many, it’s inevitable that the level of detail is skimpy.

Of those that are, some contain a list of conspiracy theories, so for just one example, the Jesuits’ “great overriding goal ... is to set up a One World Government”;



they authored *The Protocols of Zion*; and they were responsible for (among much else) sinking the *Titanic*, tutoring Hitler,

funding the Ku Klux Klan and destroying the Twin Towers. There’s no explanation, no examination, no rebuttal – which makes this book potentially dangerous: however ludicrous these ideas are, those who already believe in conspiracy theories will simply find more to believe within these pages.

Jay Vickers  
★★★★★



# Everything is extraordinary

**David V Barrett** finds much to appreciate in three very different books about the Surrealist artist Leonora Carrington

## Surreal Spaces

**The Life and Art of Leonora Carrington**

Joanna Moorhead

iThames & Hudson 2023

Hb, 224pp, £30, ISBN 9780500025512

## Armed With Madness

**The Surreal Leonora Carrington**

Mary M Talbot & Bryan Talbot

SelfMadeHero 2023

Hb, 144pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781914224126

## The Tarot of Leonora Carrington

Susan Aberth & Tere Arcq

Editorial RM 2022

Hb, 167pp, £60, ISBN 9788417975999

Leonora Carrington's star is in the ascendant, with three books on her in just a few months. Born in Lancashire in 1917, the esoteric artist lived with Max Ernst for some years, hung out with Surrealists and moved to Mexico in 1942, where she remained until her death in 2011 aged 94.

In 2006 journalist Joanna Moorhead discovered that an elderly cousin she'd known of as the black sheep of the family was actually Mexico's most famous living artist. Over the next few years she flew to Mexico City twice a year to visit her, chatting for hours around her kitchen table.

In her warmly written *Surreal Spaces* Moorhead visits places Carrington lived, exploring their impact on her art from her childhood onwards. Evocative photographs of the places are juxtaposed with over 30 of Carrington's astonishing paintings.

Carrington's life really lights up when she meets German surrealist artist Max Ernst. "I fell in

love with Max's paintings before I fell in love with Max," she tells Moorhead. He is married and more than twice her age; when her furious father reports Ernst's exhibition to the police claiming that it's pornographic, she flees to a cottage in Cornwall with Ernst, his friend Roland Penrose and Penrose's new lover, the famous photographer Lee Miller. Other visitors included Miller's previous lover, American artist Man Ray, and his new girlfriend, Guatemalan dancer and model Ady Fidelin. It was a time of great artistic (and sexual) intermingling. Carrington was just 20.

From Cornwall they moved to Paris, where Carrington met André Breton, Picasso, Dalí and other Surrealist luminaries. Surrealism, she told Moorhead, is "the belief that nothing is ordinary; that everything in life is extraordinary. And being old is no more, no less, extraordinary than being young." In Paris she made her first art sale. Wealthy American collector Peggy Guggenheim had planned to buy a painting by Ernst (whom she later married), and instead bought one by his unknown young lover.

Their idyllic life in the south of France was interrupted by the Nazi occupation of France. Ernst, a German, fled for his own safety, and Carrington, increasingly psychologically disturbed, escaped into Spain and later Mexico.

*Armed with Madness*, a quote by Carrington, relates her story in a very different way. With text and artwork by Mary and Bryan Talbot, this is a graphic novel treatment of her life. The outline of the story is obviously much



the same, though in places the Talbots concentrate on different aspects to Moorhead: there's a lot about her time in Cornwall, and a very long and powerful section of

nightmarish scenes in the south of France and in a sanatorium in Santander, Spain. Bryan Talbot (*Luther Arkwright*, *Alice in Sunderland* etc) is a consummate comics artist, and Carrington, Ernst and the other characters spring to life in his illustrations.

Carrington was a Surrealist, but might better be called an esoteric artist. A deep spiritual thread, often very left-field, runs through her work, which included an unusual Tarot major arcana. *The Tarot of Leonora Carrington* is a sumptuous,

large-format book. This second edition expands on the 2021 Fulgur edition. It begins with a very personal introduction by one of Carrington's sons, talking about his mother's interest in Tarot. The main essay, which in part explores the links between Surrealism and occult interests, is by art historian Prof Susan Aberth and Mexican art curator Tere Arcq.

Always an individual, if not a rebel, Carrington brought her own distinctive interpretation to Tarot, in terms of colour use and symbolism, exploring, the writers say, "a feminist consciousness, both including and challenging diverse religious beliefs and traditions". Carrington often told people to bring their own interpretations to her art, refusing to give neat explanations for any of it, and this applies too to her Tarot designs – which were not for divination, but rather "a guide for the exploration of the psyche leading to the evolution of one's consciousness". The book not only includes each of the Major Arcana, many richly covered in silver and gold leaf, with detailed descriptions, but also several of Carrington's paintings in high quality reproduction.

Moorhead ★★★★★

Talbot ★★★★★

Tarot ★★★★★

## Memo for Nemo

William Firebrace

MIT Press 2022

Pb, 280pp, £25, ISBN 9780262544085

It's a truism that the depths of Earth's oceans are as alien and inhospitable to human life as another planet. Yet unlike its outer space counterpart, undersea exploration isn't a topic that's often encountered in popular-level non-fiction. Outside the context of submarine warfare (which the author barely touches on), this is the first book I've read on the subject.

It's certainly an entertaining read, covering the bathyspheres, submersibles and deep-sea research stations of the real world as well as fictional portrayals from Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (whose central character, Captain Nemo, gives this book its title) to HP Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu* and the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine*.

For the most part, Firebrace's focus is on the imagery and romance of the undersea world, rather than hard science or factual details. For a book that's published by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, it's disappointingly



thin on details of underwater hardware, even critically important issues like life support systems and

communications. Similarly, there are topics in pure science – such as the theory that Earthly life originated in deep-sea hydrothermal vents, and its implications for the possibility of life elsewhere in the Solar System – that might have featured much more prominently than they do.

Hardcore fortians may be disappointed, too, that little space is given to the countless unsolved mysteries associated with the sea. You'll find references to Atlantis and various sea-dwelling cryptids, but no detailed discussion of them. Of course, it's a mistake to judge a book too harshly by what isn't in it. In terms of what Firebrace does include – presumably the topics that most excite him personally – then it's a thoroughly enjoyable book, particularly in its account of the steady encroachment of undersea imagery into popular culture.

Andrew May

★★★

# THE HAUNTED GENERATION

## BOB FISCHER ROUNDS UP THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE PARALLEL WORLDS OF POPULAR HAUNTOLOGY

"The Megalithic Transport Network," begins Martyn Stonehouse, "is part of a larger national rail system which links historical sites throughout Derbyshire and neighbouring counties..."

The Megalithic Transport Network? That explains the sandwiches, chortle chortle. Suffice to say, if 1970s British Rail services *had* expanded to include dedicated branch lines to ancient stone circles, it would have given fresh impetus to a decade of jokes about the buffet car. Still, this delightful prospect has inspired *Megalithic Transport Network Phases 1 & 2*, a brace of excellent new albums from Chesterfield musician Martyn. Both collections employ towering modular synthesizers to depict the bustling platforms of busy stations at Bronze Age and Neolithic sites throughout the Peak District.

"The inspiration came after visiting places like Arbor Low and Nine Ladies Stone Circle in Derbyshire," continues Martyn. "I started imagining what it would be like to arrive at these special places by rail, and how the governments of the 1970s might have approached this." So does anyone fancy a daytrip to Minninglow Terminus, calling at Doll Tor and Barbrook Halt? Buy a ticket from [martynstonehouse.bandcamp.com](http://martynstonehouse.bandcamp.com). *Phase 3*, meanwhile, is still at the proposal stage, with progress detailed on new single 'Excavations On Harthill Moor'.

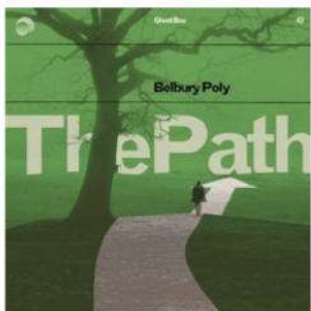
Embarking on a similarly strange journey is Newcastle-based Jayne Dent, recording as MeLostMe. Her stunning new album *RPG* is a "homage to worldbuilding", from the mythical realms of ancient folklore to the pixelated landscapes of modern console games. The album combines striking electronic soundscapes with traditional folk instrumentation... and, of course, Jayne's extraordinary singing voice. The highlight? Undoubtedly 'The Oldest Tree Holds The Earth', a beautiful folk round composed in a



Danish forest, imagining "time stretched out between the branches of impossibly old beings". Follow the acorns to [upsettherhythm.bandcamp.com](http://upsettherhythm.bandcamp.com).

For thrills of a more urban nature, try *The Hexagonal World of the Twelve Hour Foundation*. A grin-inducing album of Radiophonic Workshop-inspired tunes commissioned to celebrate the Brutalist architecture of Reading, it's the latest collection from Bristol-based Jez Butler and Polly Hulse. The duo create the finest feelgood melodies in the business, and their own utilitarian concrete shopping centre can be found at [thetwelvehourfoundation.bandcamp.com](http://thetwelvehourfoundation.bandcamp.com).

Meanwhile, Gavin Brick and Phil Heeks are gazing at the stars. If their collaborative pseudonym Ardala seems vaguely familiar, she's the undeniably glamorous – if somewhat untrustworthy – princess from *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*. Brick and Heeks have poured their love of 1980s TV sci-fi into *Halls of Antiquity*, a glorious album of bombastic synthpop themes available



from [ardala.bandcamp.com](http://ardala.bandcamp.com). And looking even further back into sci-fi history is John D'Alex Seodah-Johnson... aka Sound Effects Of Death And Horror. John's new album *Rossum: Experimental Radio* uses a 1937 radio adaptation of Karel Capek's 1920 play *RUR* as the foundation for an ambitious concept album about the uneasy relationship between humankind and its robotic creations. No AI at work here though; John's album has a splendidly organic feel, weaving dub basslines around vintage analogue synths. Send your subservient automaton of choice to [wormholeworld.bandcamp.com](http://wormholeworld.bandcamp.com).

From the literary world, I very much enjoyed *Bait*. It's a fun novella by Paul Childs, following the trials of two contemporary youngsters charged with protecting the mysterious Penlock Forest from a badger-hungry criminal gang. It somehow combines the feel of the Children's Film Foundation with a splendid hint of Arthur Machen, and Paul's own strange corner of the countryside is located at [paulchilds.co.uk](http://paulchilds.co.uk). I'm also very taken with *A Strange Peace*, the



latest volume of photography by Ben Holton. A celebration of the "edgelands" between towns and their surrounding countryside, it finds curious beauty in overgrown sheds, discarded gloves and – chillingly – a hypodermic needle lodged in the slender trunk of a tree. It comes accompanied by a soothing CD of Ben's own delightfully restorative folk-influenced tunes, and is available to pre-order now from [digital.waysideandwoodland.com](http://digital.waysideandwoodland.com).

And how better to conclude than with a new release from Ghost Box Records? Label co-founder Jim Jupp has assembled a veritable supergroup for his latest album as Belbury Poly. With US narrator Justin Hopper summoning the spirit of *The Twilight Zone*'s Rod Serling, and guests including Midlake flautist Jesse Chandler, *The Path* is a semi-sequel to Jim's 2020 album, *The Gone Away*. Both records concern themselves with the malevolent antics of Britain's fairy population, but this new instalment feels more expansive. "It carries the idea of fairy folklore, with its constant themes of vanishing and disappearance, into a modern era," explains Jim. "So fairy enchantments can manifest as alienation, mental health issues, environmental damage and the general weirdness of the British landscape."

In an unexpected twist, the music itself takes inspiration from a legion of funky 1970s British crime flick soundtracks – and it sounds terrific. Grab a copy from [ghostbox.co.uk](http://ghostbox.co.uk) and just imagine a pixie-led Michael Caine taking a British Rail train to... well, a Neolithic stone circle. What's that? Buffet car all out of sandwiches? Try the fairy cakes instead.

Visit [www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk](http://www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk), send details of new releases, or memories of the "haunted" era to [hauntedgeneration@gmail.com](mailto:hauntedgeneration@gmail.com), or find me on Twitter... @bob\_fischer



## On the trail of the Texas Dogman

The latest crypto-documentary from the Small Town Monsters shows off the team's increasing technical skills but struggles to find much evidence for its fearsome-sounding subject



### The Dogman Triangle

**Dir Seth Breedlove, US 2023**

Available now on streaming platforms

Based on *The Texas Dogman Triangle*, a book by Aaron Deese published by Small Town Monsters Press, *The Dogman Triangle: Werewolves in the Lone Star State* is the third film from the Small Town Monsters documentary series to study supernatural phenomena of the canine variety, following on the heels of *Skinwalker: Howl of the Rougarou* (2021) and *American Werewolves* (2022).

While other Dogman-like creatures are discussed, including the Beast of Bear Creek and the Bear King of Marble Falls – similar region-based monsters accused of indiscriminate and violent attacks on both livestock and humans – the bulk of the film consists of eyewitness accounts of encounters with a man-like dog with large, bloody teeth, which roams within a roughly 700-square mile area of Texas named by Deese “the Dogman Triangle”.

Hard evidence of the Dogman is in short supply. What evidence does exist includes audio of a distinctly explicable howl and cell phone footage so blurry

as to be, as the investigators admit, frustratingly inconclusive. Moreover, eyewitness descriptions of the Dogman vary considerably from person to person, with some mentioning distinct features, such as glowing orange eyes, that are missing from other accounts, or considerable differences in the creature's appearance, size, and build – anywhere from six to 11 feet (1.8 to 3.3m) tall. The account of a Dogman's attempt to infiltrate a house filled with young girls hearkens back to scary tales told around campfires or low budget 1970s-1980s era horror films. Historical accounts have the air of tabloid *Weekly World News* stories and made this viewer yearn for a simpler time when such fake news was digested with equal doses of irony and sincerity.

*The Dogman Triangle* is an enjoyable, if lightweight, Texas-style foray into cryptid territory, and seems better suited as a companion to Deese's book than as a stand-alone film. It suffers from the usual drawbacks of documentaries on unknown cryptids; it's heavy on eyewitness accounts and grasps at various straws – government conspiracies, UFOs, and ancient stones – in order to compensate for the distinct lack of evidence and to up the paranormal porn

ante. Yet it also benefits from the increasingly professional technical film-making skills of the Small Town Monsters company and the considered viewpoints of knowledgeable cryptid historians. Deese and fellow researcher Shannon Legro are the primary investigators here, and the film hinges on their Mulder-and-Scully-like believer-versus-sceptic interplay. Along for the ride are several additional researchers known for similar cryptid investigations, including Lyle Blackburn, Ken Gerhard, and Nick Redfern, who provide context to the Dogman phenomena.

Sceptical explanations of the Dogman are proffered, naturally – for example, that it is a hoax or merely an example of misidentification – including the Bigfoot standby of a mange-ridden bear, or a particularly ferocious mountain lion, or a hyena escaped from private captivity. Yet the rational explanations, as is often the case, seem entirely beside the point – namely that cryptids both old and new largely exist to stir the imagination and to help us hang onto that last vestige of the unknown, a darkness that the cold light of science and rationalism cannot possibly hope to penetrate.

Eric Hoffman



### May

**Dir Lucky McKee, US 2002**

Second Sight, Blu-ray £18.99

First released in 2002 to general public indifference *May* has subsequently become something of a cult favourite. One can see why: it's a black comedy-horror with quirky characters, an offbeat aesthetic and just enough blood and guts to prevent it from being too cuddly. Starring scream queen *de nos jours* Angela Bettis, the film depicts the descent into madness (not really that much of a trip) of *May*, a shy veterinary assistant who just wants someone to love. Up to the point where *May* snaps, the film is actually an amusing and oddly sweet girl-meets-boy, girl-loses-boy-by-biting-him, girl-meets-girl, girl-is-cheated-on-by-girl thwarted romance story that, had director Lucky McKee chosen to go in a different direction, could have ended happily for everyone and been pretty unremarkable. Fortunately for the viewer, McKee opts to go nuclear and mayhem, not to mention, carnage ensues. *May*'s chosen route to happiness, such as it is, won't come as a surprise to horror fans, but the ultra-black treatment of it is distinctive.

Despite being 20 years old, *May* feels fresh, singular and ahead of its time. It's full of good performances – as well as Bettis, there's a great turn from Anna Faris – and the soundtrack is excellent. Nowadays every film, no matter how obscure, unsuccessful or downright crap, eventually gets a bells-and-whistles reissue, but *May* genuinely deserves one because a lot of people who will love it would have missed out at the time. There are two good audio commentaries and interviews with everyone involved, including editor Rian Johnson, who has gone on to success as a director.

Daniel King





## TELEVISION

FT's very own couch potato, STU NEVILLE, casts an eye over the small screen's current fortean offerings



TV programmes about the weird, as has been noted before, have a tendency towards the dramatic and slightly breathy preface. *The Unexplained Files* (Quest) is no exception. "There are global phenomena the science cannot explain!" announces the voiceover. In tone and scope it has overtones of *Fortean TV*, though without the genial linkage of Lionel Fanthorpe, in that it doesn't just go for the obvious, but also covers less well-known stuff. For example, S2E9, 'Forbidden Land Of The Giants', looks at seemingly giant human bones unearthed in Eastern Europe and the strange case of Overtoun Bridge and its suicidal effect on dogs (cue Steadicam

footage of a run at and over the parapet, accompanied by barking; I didn't say it was subtle).

First to Georgia – the Caucasus one – to an area helpfully called Valley of the Giants in which we are told there is a purported burial site for... well, giants. In the 1990s, following a tip-off from locals, an archaeological expedition unearthed a couple of skeletons which on examination by Dr Vekua

*Gratifyingly, both Davies and Fenton are sporting the cryptozoology hat*

of the State University appear to be the same size as the tallest recorded humans. Are they a lost human sub-species? It gets murky, though, as just after Vekua's death the bones vanished. Enter investigator Bruce Fenton, hefting his expeditionary luggage onto horses in preparation for a delve. Fenton believes there was a global giant culture and the evidence is out there – but there are suggestions that their quest is being obstructed by official forces, as permits are abruptly suspended; so discussion switches to what the skeletons were. True giants? Nephilim? A jaunt to Flores, a chat with Adam Davies about Orang Pendek (gratifyingly, both he and Fenton are sporting the cryptozoology hat), Jeff Meldrum shows up – it's an all-star episode.

Away to the Dumbarton, and its pooch-inimical bridge. For a number of years, dogs

of all shapes and hues have been flinging themselves off it for no apparent reason to their owners' distressed bafflement (some survive, but many do not). Local journo Willie Cochrane takes up the story, filmed in the pub for local colour. Having heard about a recent near-fatality, he sends out feelers and is shocked at the sheer volume of stories. Dr David Sands, animal behaviourist (and near-cryptozoology hat wearer) sets up an experiment with his own Go Pro-equipped dog, on a sensibly strong lead, theorising that as dogs don't understand architecture they don't know there's a drop. What are they chasing? Squirrels? Levitating otters? Ghosts (a dogwalker claims to have seen one at a window in the adjoining house)? Theories abound, but no answers emerge, as in time-honoured fashion the voiceover re-asks the questions as the credits roll. It's fun, though.

## THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot!

I went to a furry convention once. It was for a book I was writing, and I met many adults dressed as foxes, cats and mostly... dogs. I particularly remember leaving the toilets just as one guy crawled toward the urinals in a leather dog suit. Sure, it was odd, but I'm an open-minded fellow. If it's not hurting anyone, crawl on!

Norwegian movie *Good Boy!* (digital platforms) cranks that approach for scares when the chronically disorganised Sigrid arrives late for her Tinder date. The quiet, handsome Christian is kind and understanding of her quirks. The date goes well, so she stays over. The following morning she meets his dog: only it's a man in a dog suit called Frank. She's repelled and storms out,

but after watching YouTube videos on 'puppy play', and discussions on prejudice with her housemate, she reconsiders. What if the issue is her own vanilla mind? *Good Boy!* is smart, gripping and brilliantly twisted. It reminded me of a 1990s Hollywood thriller, but with themes that would have made no sense back then: Internet dating, phone addiction and issues of personal identity choice. All three become intelligent plot points in a brilliantly acted thriller. That it somehow manages to avoid being simply a knee-jerk reaction to identity politics is quite a feat.

*Mother, May I?* (digital platforms) explores identity issues too, only this time it's how unqualified people can

*If Ken Loach remade The Evil Dead you might get this*

battle through trauma using self-taught role-play therapy. Sometimes that works... sometimes it really doesn't. Once again, the leads are excellent, but while *Good Boy!* is both a clever and grounded story, *Mother, May I?* keeps things cerebral. Despite it being harder to grasp, this hazy, simmering trip into Oedipal themes brings a slow dread of its own.

Speaking of slow, *The Knocking* (digital platforms) is a gloomy, unhurried family drama about three adult siblings who return to their childhood home. Only it's a cabin in the woods, where an axe murder occurred, the parents are dead, and there's a supernatural force in the forest. If Ken Loach remade

*The Evil Dead*, you might get this. You'll wait a long time for the folk horror to really kick in, and there are odd choices along the way (the sudden rap song over the credits took me aback). Yet there were moments that chilled me – like the scene when the older sister accepts a phone call and those final, nightmare seconds. Yikes!

Lastly, we sail on *The Queen Mary*, (digital platforms) a real, but now permanently docked, luxury ocean liner. It's said to be 'the world's most haunted ship'. *Dracula Untold* director Gary Shore takes these claims and runs full pelt with them, throwing murderous spirits, maritime myths and axe-wielding puppet-faced men into the mix. Low budget, yet lavish, it's told across two-time frames. It's an energetic, if exhausting voyage, but I took to its ambition and balls-out lunacy – a weird, enjoyably hyperactive horror.




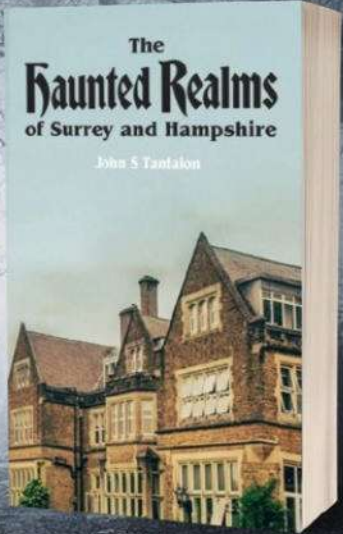



**HAVE YOU  
EVER SEEN  
A GHOST?**

Do you have a  
supernatural  
story to tell?  
Are you interested  
in being  
part of a  
documentary  
series /  
podcast/  
book?

To find out more, contact:  
**INPURSUITOFGHOSTS@GMAIL.COM**

**THE BRAND NEW BOOK**  
FROM THE HAUNTED WORLD  
OF JOHN S TANTALON



**ARRIVING  
JUNE 2023**



# ForteanTimes

**Join our 50th Anniversary Reader Survey Competition  
for a chance to win some fantastic prizes!**

**CALLING ALL FORTEAN TIMES READERS!**

*Your voice has always inspired our exploration of the world of strange phenomena,  
and now we invite you to join us on our continuing quest.*

*Help shape the future of Fortean Times by sharing your thoughts and opinions with us!*

**WIN FABULOUS PRIZES!**

**1st Prize: Instant Camera**

**4 Runners-up: Maglite Flashlights**

*Don't miss your chance to win! To take the survey and enter the competition visit:*

**<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ftsurvey23>**

*Please ensure you complete and submit the survey by 14 September 2023.*



# LETTERS

CONTACT US BY POST: PO BOX 1200, WHITSTABLE CT1 9RH, OR E-MAIL [SIEVEKING@FORTEANTIMES.COM](mailto:sieveking@forteantimes.com)  
PLEASE PROVIDE US WITH YOUR POSTAL ADDRESS



## Rectal phenomena

Reading the article 'Here's sick in your eye' [FT431:50] reminded me of a book entitled *We Are Electric* by Sally Adee. In this we read that Alexander von Humboldt inserted a silver wire connected to a galvanic pile into his rectum from which he experienced involuntary faecal expulsions, abdominal cramps, and visual sensations. He then forced the wire in further and experienced a bright white light before his eyes (p. 61). Experimentation on criminals was allowed in 1803, so wires were placed in most parts of the bodies including the rectum in front of a packed audience (p. 49).

**James Wilkins**

*Southampton, Hampshire*

## Chip wrapping

Mythchaser [FT433:27] suggested two popular answers as to why fish and chips no longer come wrapped in newspaper. Potential hazards from ink were one. I think there's an implication that fish and chips used to come wrapped *direct* in newspaper. I can remember that, while back in the 1970s fish and chips were always wrapped in newspaper (how appalled were some of us when Styrofoam boxes appeared!), they were never wrapped *directly* in newspaper. Getting newspaper ink on your fingers was common back then, but no one thought that it was good for you and no one wanted it on their chips – so far as I can recall there was always a small paper bag for the chips and a square or two of light brown plain paper before the newspaper. However, I can't vouch for anything before the 1970s.

- Good to see the review by Ted Harrison – his fiction book based on Elvis was a stonking read which I bought after it was reviewed in FT. And keep up the good work as they say. Still reading FT from cover to cover.

**John Parkes**

*Leeds, West Yorkshire*

## Mundane origin?

Regarding the scorch marks on the door of St Mary's Church in Blythburgh, Suffolk, said to have

## SIMULAGRA CORNER



Robin Bennett, while visiting Badbury Rings in Dorset, noticed this beech tree with a penis (above).

Mark Drefs snapped these tree gonads at Claude Moore Park in northern Virginia (below).

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH or to [sieveking@forteantimes.com](mailto:sieveking@forteantimes.com)



been made by "the Devil in dog form", or alternatively to have been scorched as part of a spell to drive away evil: a local guide to Blythburgh on sale in the church suggests that the burn marks were made with a red-hot poker by a farrier in the days when the church was commandeered by Cromwell's New Model Army in the late 1640s. The church briefly became a farrier's shop for shoeing the army's horses. The guidebook is *Holy Trinity Blythburgh: Cathedral of the Marshes*, by Hugh Roberts, Mary Montague and Barry Naylor (1999).

**Matt Salusbury**  
*London*

## Seven Kings death announcement

I can't be sure if this is a solution to Holger Haase's conundrum [FT432:66], regarding a radio announcement that Stephen King had fallen to his death from a balcony in London, but it may be a possibility.

I remember a news story from 2010 of a young man from Seven Kings, London, who fell from a balcony while on holiday in Majorca in 2010 ([www.ilfordrecorder.co.uk/news/21218803.seven-kings-man-plummets-30ft-death-hotel-balcony/](http://www.ilfordrecorder.co.uk/news/21218803.seven-kings-man-plummets-30ft-death-hotel-balcony/)).

The case attracted national interest as it was linked to a craze of 'balconing' that had been implicated in several injuries and deaths in Spanish resorts, whereby intoxicated holidaymakers would do parkour-like stunts to impress a watching crowd ([www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/holiday-brit-dies-in-balcony-plunge-245901](http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/holiday-brit-dies-in-balcony-plunge-245901)).

Could it be that Mr & Mrs Haase half-heard a report of this death, which used the phrases 'Seven Kings', 'London', 'fell to his death from a balcony' and possibly something like 'putting on a show' and, not being as familiar with suburbs of Ilford as with the Maine maestro of the macabre, their minds constructed what seemed like the most likely story which startled them into attention and the rush to find more details, of which there were of course, none.

**David Wilson**  
*By email*





## Sunbows

Cycling home Sunday 28 May 2023 about 7.15pm, I saw this beautiful arrangement of rainbows around the Sun [left]. It hadn't been raining that day, or the day before.

**Dean Teasdale**

*Gateshead, Tyne & Wear*

I took this photo [below left] of sundogs and sunbows yesterday (28 May) from our front garden. I've seen them before, but never as weird as this.

**Alison Young**

*Durham*

### Bob Rickard comments:

*I thought sunbows and sundogs were basically two different descriptions of the standard parhelia ('mock suns'), which form at 22 degrees from the line of sight to the Sun, when light passes through ice crystals in the air. Possibly they could describe two phases of the same process – one applying to the outer ring (bow) and the other to the presence of the two or more mock suns on the outer ring. 'Sunbow' most likely derived from its similarity to the 'moonbow' which is more visible at night with a slight high-altitude mistiness. This too can have the 'dogs' on the outer ring (see here: <https://www.sciencefocus.com/planet-earth/moonbows-8-stunning-photos-of-the-rare-night-sky-phenomenon/>)*



**LEFT:** A sun dog phenomenon depicted in the 1493 Nuremberg Chronicle.

## Stone of Destiny

You report that the An Lia Fail, the Stone of Destiny, is of sandstone local to Scone [FT433:6]. However, old tales say that this stone is a forgery created to trick Edward I of England, and that the original stone was of 'meteoric or semi-metallic' content, and possibly still lies buried somewhere, perhaps on the Hill of Dunsinane.

If so, the right of English monarchs to claim to be monarchs of Scotland may be legally doubtful. And in any case, there has not yet been any such person as Elizabeth II

of Scotland, so Charles's right to rule dangles from a doubly shoochy peg.

**Ewan McVicar**

*By email*

## Fairies and a twerp

I loved reading the article about 'fairy glens' [FT433:32-39]. It automatically reignited memories of my pre-10-year-old childhood. At that time (early 1970s) my parents would take us on holiday on the Kent coast, mainly Seasalter and Herne Bay. One brief (and decidedly misty) recollection was taking a walk along the clifftop from Herne

Bay to Reculver. Part of it dipped into a narrow cleft, the bottom of which was a murky trickle of water that disappeared into the shingle beach and sea. This was Bishopstone Glen, I was told.

The path led across a rudimentary wooden bridge, attached to which was a metal drainpipe with a slotted cover. Looking past this was – from long memory – a small, shaded 'glen' consisting of ferns, tree roots, an attempt at muddy terracing and one or two model cottages. This was the Glen. People were encouraged to lob a coin or two down the drainpipe for "maintenance of the Glen".

Several years later, when my parents moved to Herne Bay, I often wandered the shore between the Bay and Reculver. Sadly, the bridge had been removed so developers could put more houses up, and the Glen long gone!

It's nice, though, to see a photo of Bishopstone Glen in its... er... heyday?

• Is the interview with Garth Marengi [FT433:40-41] meant to be funny? Since I'd never heard the name, I read the article with an open mind and immediately thought "What an utterly pretentious twerp!" When I had access to the Internet, I discovered that it's a fictional character – a pretentious twerp. Two pages taken up with an idiotic fake-interview with someone who doesn't exist. OK, so it might've been hilarious – and characteristic – but only to those who'd heard of the character.

**Alan Cassady-Bishop**

*Filey, North Yorkshire*

## Spook Lane

In 'Fortean Fairyland Postcard Gazetteer' [FT433:38-39], 'Pook Lane' is mentioned as being in Havant, Hampshire, when strictly speaking it's situated in Warblington. And unfortunately, 'Puck' can't lay a claim to this area as it was originally called 'Spook Lane', which was regularly used by the smuggling fraternity in times gone by. Naturally, it served them well to spread tales of hauntings in order to keep any inquisitive locals from discovering their activities. Incidentally, Nazi propaganda broadcaster William Joyce – aka 'Lord Haw Haw' – called Pook Lane his home at one time. The house is no longer there, having burnt down years ago.

**Steve Pescott**

*Emsworth, Hampshire*

## Seat of consciousness

Regarding James Wright's letter about consciousness [FT430:65], I have to say that I agree with Yann Martel's 'peep hole' or concentration upon one point in existence; or as Walter Pittman of Gettysburg College put it: "What if truth is just an experience of consciousness?" In other words what we are conscious of is a light bulb moment

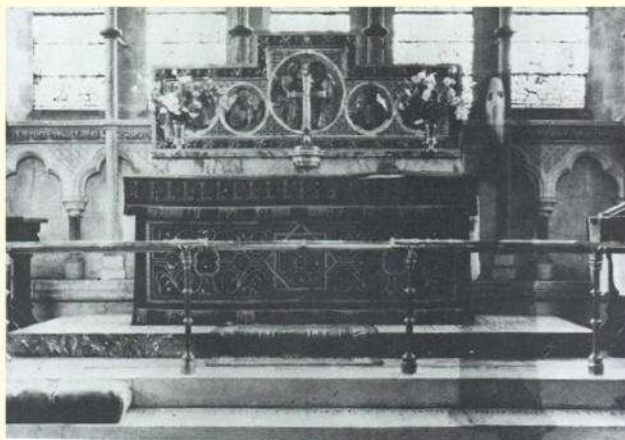
about a specific point in space and time as unconsciousness is everything else in existence that we don't notice, even though it may exist. Therefore consciousness is concentration upon just one particular point of reality. I liken it to dispersed attention as opposed to concentrated attention.

Think of four arrows in each of the cardinal points – north/south/east/west; introversion is these pointing inwards and extroversion is them pointing outwards.

To quote 'Peter' from Tony Hawkes 'Round Ireland with a Fridge': "You see life is little more than dream, the world isn't a physical reality but a three-dimensional illusion. Our left side knows this but our right side takes the materialist view. Our left side knows that life is a chosen adventure in consciousness. We are conscious beings who have freely chosen to be physical [*concentrate our energy into matter*\*]. Consciousness didn't emerge from matter; matter emerged from consciousness. You see everything is interconnected – all energy, all consciousness. There are no separate objects or separate beings. Time, space and separateness are illusions. So nothing actually exists."

See brain discoveries about left (passive/receptive) and right hemispheres (active/transmissive side) as with the severing of the corpus callosum or 'A Stroke of Insight' by Jill Bolte Taylor. There are two extreme ends of the spectrum: those interested in the microcosm (detailed awareness or concentrated attention as with scientists and academics – thinkers or inner life addicts) and those into the macrocosm (general awareness of reality as in sportsmen etc; or what I call dispersed attention or doers/actors on life's stage).

As for The Turing Test – can a machine understand? Can it replicate? Can it create something original (not imitation)? Obedience means programmable and thinkers challenge and question everything (see Patrick McGooohan's TV series *The Prisoner*). They are not followers but self-led (rebels against believing everything without proof). Intelligence is the ability to sense and make sense of the world (learn



## Newby Church ghost

I was interested to see the Newby Church ghost photograph feature in 'Revisiting Arthur C Clarke's *World of Strange Powers*' [FT433:44]. I researched this extensively in 2019, contacting the Reverend Kenneth Lord's son, and Tim Newton. As always, there is more to the backstory than is commonly known.

The Reverend Lord took the photograph in 1954, when he was newly ordained and newly in his first parish, with a new double lens reflex camera, which he was using for the first time. He placed the photograph in an album, where it remained unremarked until 1967, when someone removed it, without his knowledge, and sent it to *The People* to his intense displeasure; he never intended it to be public knowledge.

The programme shows Tim Newton and Dr Steve Gull of the Police Scientific Development Branch in Sandridge, Hertfordshire, in 1984 using a Digital PDP11 mainframe computer to analyse several well-known ghost photographs. This facility is described in the voiceover by Anna Ford as using "unique de-blurring software used on the number-plates of getaway cars and ensnaring criminals by enhancing photographs to bring out hidden details."

They analyse the Newby ghost photograph (which is not blurred) and Tim Newton declares: "Even the most rigorous computer analysis cannot provide a simple explanation. I don't think that at this stage, there is anything unusual about the picture at all, it's unlikely to be built up by a super-imposition of photographs, so this could be a candidate for a ghost."

Well, I would hold, on the contrary, that even today, no examination by computer or human could detect a well-executed double exposure. With the camera firmly on a tripod, and the long exposure demanded by the dim church, the shutter could have been re-cocked without winding on the film, and re-fired after the 'ghost' was in position; or even simpler, a piece of cardboard could have been held in front of the lens. The resulting image would be indistinguishable from a normal photograph; and note that the photograph that has come down to us has been cropped to a rectangle. Twin lens reflex cameras take square images; if all four edges have been cropped, then even a "super-imposition of photographs" (I presume Newton meant negatives) would be undetectable. Alas – I can't help imagining a hatstand and coathanger supporting the *Scream* (1996 film) mask and robe.

Who did it? Well, I don't necessarily point the finger at the Reverend Lord; I could construct a scenario in which the regulars down the local pub decided to have some fun with the naive new vicar. There is plenty of space behind the altar reredos to hide.

**Roger J Morgan**  
London

from own experience).

There is research going on in France at the moment I believe, where experiments are being carried out to create new materials, atom by atom. In Bulgaria, again atom by atom, work is being carried out to create thinking – not just programmable – robots (seen in a mechanical engineering magazine but not by me; information passed on). Professor Khajetoorians of Radboud University in Bulgaria has used cobalt atoms, attached to black phosphorus, to make an AI that can replicate connections and learn, as do animals. Quantum physics builds from the bottom up (microcosmic growth as in genetics), whereas Newtonian physics is concerned with the 'built' (macrocosmic) universe – in other words it uses what is here.

Anyone wishing to wander further through my fevered brain could try my Quora blog spot, An Empty Head.

[\*My addition]

**Tony Sanday**

By email

## The three Nephites

Regarding "Immortals Among Us" [FT432:29], I wonder if readers are aware of the legend of the "Three Nephites". *The Book of Mormon* (the text held to be sacred by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, aka Mormons) gives an account of two migrations from the Old World to the Americas. One took place after the destruction of the Tower of Babel by a people known as Jaredites, but the most significant account is that of the family of Lehi whom God warned to flee Jerusalem around 600 BC to evade its destruction.

The 531-page narrative covers the period from that flight until the year AD 421, during which time the principal sons of Lehi – Nephi and Laman – divide into the warring tribes of Nephites and Lamanites; the former are (mostly) righteous and the latter not. The peoples are visited by Jesus Christ in America after his resurrection in Jerusalem and called to missionary work, but eventually the Nephites are virtually destroyed by the



# LETTERS

Lamanites.

However, three of the Nephites receive a promise from Christ that “Ye shall never taste death but ye shall live to behold the doings of the Father unto the children of men, even until all things shall be fulfilled according to the will of the Father, when I shall come in my glory with the powers of heaven.” (3<sup>rd</sup> Nephi Chapter 28, verse 7, page 461). They were to be free from pain and sorrow and were to minister “as the angels of God” unto the Jews, Gentiles, scattered tribes of Israel “and unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people.”

Mormon folklore since the foundation of the Church in 1830 contains many references to visitations of the Three Nephites to those in distress and one late Apostle of the Church (Bruce R McConkie) in 1958 wrote in his book *Mormon Doctrine* that “unbeknownst to the world, they are continuing their assigned ministry at this time”.

**Gary Clarke**

*Hunmanby, North Yorkshire*

## Phantom monk

Two police officers, two security guards, a father and son, and several married couples were amongst the multitude of eyewitnesses of extraordinary happenings in the general vicinity of the six-mile stretch of highway, the Stocksbridge Bypass, a small section of the larger A616 road, connecting Manchester to Sheffield. Some saw children, but most reported a monk-like figure. It is one of the most convincing, well-documented and relatively recent hauntings I have ever heard about.

It featured in two documentaries *Strange... But True* and *Ghost Hunters* (both usually available on YouTube), but in my mind the best write-up of the history of the mystery is by FT contributor Dr David Clarke in his article ‘Road Ghosts’, which can be found at <https://drdavid-clarke.co.uk/urban-legendary/road-ghosts/>.

I covered the story in my first published book *Yorkshire of the Supernatural* (1999), and the last recorded experience was in the late 1990s. However, in March 2023, I received an email from



## What is it?

Nick Harris asks if anyone had any ideas about the object in his photo [FT433:66]. I think that it may be the terminal element of an eel-trap and may have been attached to a funnel-shaped device – originally of withies or hide, perhaps, and probably removeable – used to drive eels into, possibly at a fish-weir. The eels would have been driven into the broad end and eventually into the protruding bundles of spikes at the end – caught head-first, they would not have been able to escape.

You might compare the protruding structures to three-pronged “Eel Forks” from Days of Old. The last I saw were a good selection at The Museum of Welsh Life at St Fagan’s, just outside Cardiff. The museum is well worth a look, if you’re ever in our neck of the woods.

**Jane Dyer, Cardiff**

I believe Nick Harris’s unidentified object is a wool separator. The wooden panel would be propped up or laid across someone’s lap for them to take chunks of freshly clipped wool and pull them through. The repeated pulling through the needles helps untangle the mass into something more suitable to work from, such as turning it into yarn.

**Calum Chalmers, Chesham, Buckinghamshire**

Nick Harris’s object looks to me very much like a device for heckling (combing) flax – a home-made version made from recycled materials rather like the one in the photo below, which was recently sold on Etsy.

**Lisa Gledhill, Goring, Oxfordshire**



Tracey Crossland who wrote:

“I was in a friend’s house, and I spotted your book and wondered if the Stocksbridge by-pass ghost would be in it, and I was so pleased when it was. I just had to tell you this!

“In around 2011, I was going down the bypass with a friend in his car. We were looking for a pub, but there wasn’t one about, so we turned around in a little lay-by, just down a small road off the bypass and then my friend said: ‘Tracey, look, there’s a ghost!’

“I was spellbound as I had already seen it and I said: ‘I know, I can see it’. It was so clear that you could see the texture of the robe the ghost was wearing. He was smiling and leant on a tree with his arm raised to hold him up. I said: ‘Put your full beam on,’ and then the figure faded away, like the picture in an old television set, when the channel had gone off. And then there was nothing.

“There was no doubt in our minds that we had seen a ghost. We kept saying: ‘It was a ghost’. It lasted about 10 seconds. I was scared but so excited! I knew nothing of the bypass ghost, but googled it when I got home and couldn’t believe that there were other sightings of a monk who haunted the bypass. This is who we had seen in the robes. I just thought you might be interested in this story as it was definitely the bypass ghost that we both saw that night.”

**Andy Owens**

*Halifax, West Yorkshire*

*Editor’s note: For more on the Stocksbridge bypass haunting, see FT73:30, 75:56, 77:56 (1994).*





# It Happened to Me...

## Phantom neighing

I would like to relate a very strange experience which occurred about 25 years ago in the late 1990s in rural Buckinghamshire. I and my wife were in our house watching TV one evening. It was still light enough to see outside. We lived in a semi-detached house in Little Chalfont, a road called Lodge Lane which ran from Little Chalfont down towards Chalfont St Giles. Where our house was there were houses on one side of the road only, opposite farmland. There was a raised straight concrete and gravel drive from the road up to the house. Next to the house the drive continued between ours and a neighbour's house, up to the two houses' garages behind the houses.

We suddenly heard the sound of a horse outside our house, neighing. My wife asked me to investigate as there were usually no horses in the fields and the sound seemed to be very close to the house. I went out the front door and yes, there right in front of me was the sound of a horse neighing, breathing, and walking on the drive between the two houses – except there was nothing to see!

In the next few minutes my wife and two of our neighbours came out to see what was happening. The neighbours had also heard the horse sounds, which I suppose demonstrates how loud they were. Together we were four sober adults.

We were able to pinpoint where the 'horse' was by walking through the sound and out the other side, going up and down the drive and noting that there were no actual horses to be seen anywhere. There was nothing to touch, but we experienced this phenomenon for about six minutes. We could all hear what appeared to be a single horse – breathing, neighing and clip clopping on the ground. It didn't appear to be moving much, as the sound was coming from more or less the same location. There was no heat or smell, just sound. The gravel was undisturbed. I think it's fair to say that the 'horse' didn't appear to especially react to us.



## "We could all hear what appeared to be a single horse neighing"

At the end of the event, we all went back indoors, none the wiser regarding what had just happened. I lived at that house for about four years or so (roughly two years before and two years after). It is conceivable that sometime in the past (this was rural Buckinghamshire after all), there may have been stables and horses at the precise site – these houses were not especially old, perhaps built in the 1970s plus or minus 10 years.

**Adam Barak**

*By email*

## Substitutes

A few months ago, I started microdosing psilocybin (magic mushroom) – 0.25g every three days. In less than a year, I separated from my partner after 30 years and my father died – and I often felt anxious and a bit low (but I have never been clinically depressed).

Shortly after my first dose, as I was scanning my father's old slides, I stumbled upon a series of pictures he took when we were on holiday in the Italian Alps, around 1985. They showed my mother, my then best friend Marie-France and me in various poses – nothing out of the ordinary. After a series of slides of mountain landscapes, one photograph immediately struck

me as odd and uncanny: two teenagers and a woman were standing next to a mountain refuge. They looked a lot like us (mum, Marie-France and me), but I felt certain they were not us. As I zoomed in, the faces I saw were not mine, not my mum's, not Marie-France's. Mine (or the one that should have been mine) was especially odd, distorted, with a nose that could not have been mine – it was *not* me. Sure, they were similar, but compared to the ones I scanned a few minutes earlier, those faces had nothing in common. I knew it wasn't possible; the people in the picture had the same clothes, sunglasses and hairstyle as ours. They should have been us, and yet they were not. I felt immediately very ill at ease, as if I had just seen something I shouldn't have seen – and deleted the scanned slide from my computer, wondering what just happened.

A few days after that, I looked at the picture again and everything was back to normal. My face was still a bit distorted because I was staring at the Sun, but it was definitely me, mum and Marie-France. Since then I wondered if that uncanny experience had just been a side-effect of the psilocybin, or something else, like a glimpse at a parallel reality (or both maybe...)

**Catherine Dupont**

*Habergy, Belgium*

## Dream echoes

This morning [21 January] my FT arrived in our postbox and I had a quick flick through before going

out. One thing I read was about Benjamin Creme's provocative "God is now here/God is nowhere" newspaper statement mentioned in the letter entitled 'Nathaniels' [FT428:66]. In the afternoon my partner Sarah and I went into the pub 'The Lamb of Rhos' in Carmarthenshire only to find a wooden seat engraved with an ambiguous 'Now Here' or 'Nowhere'.

I have had many coincidences and synchronicities in my life and they normally come in clusters. Once I entered a charity shop in Carmarthen where the CDs were displayed with a radio on top playing a pop station. I always browse for rock or folk CDs and as I was looking across the CDs saw one by the artist Pink. This was of no interest to me except for the fact she was mentioned on the radio at exactly the same time I read the spine of the CD. This is more than just reading the same word as it was the same person.

Another time something similar happened when I was reading the beta edition of my friend's book on a tablet whilst riding on the train from Taunton. I read the word 'Bridgwater' and as I looked up we had just pulled into Bridgwater station.

I read Gary Lachman's article about dreams foretelling things [FT415:32-38]. Very soon after this I dreamed that my roof was held by a single nail. This was during a time of storms in the area. A day or so later we were re-watching *Nathan Barley* for the first time in years and there was a comment about a roof being held up by one nail.

I have also had a couple of dreams that seem to be more meaningful, such as a dream of a friend dying around the time their sister died and a dream before the twin towers of a plane hitting a block of flats. Both of these were highly unpleasant. Often I will think of something like a song or read about it only to hear it a few hours later. I can't see any significance in most of this except for the fact that it does make me wonder.

Still loving the magazine after decades of reading.

**Ian Arkley**

*Carmarthen*



# READER INFO

## HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

ANNUAL SUB of 12 issues (inc p&p) UK £50.58; Europe £62; USA £70; Rest of World £70.

Please see house ads in the latest issue for details of special offers.

## UK, EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA & REST OF WORLD

Major credit cards accepted. Cheques or money orders should be in sterling, preferably drawn on a London bank and made payable to Diamond Publishing Limited. Mail to: **Fortean Times**, Diamond Publishing Limited, 2nd Floor, Saunders House, 52-53 The Mall, Ealing, W5 3AT. NB: This address should be used for orders and subscriptions only.

Telephone payments and queries: +44 (0) 208 752 8195.

E-mail payments and queries: [hello@metropolis.co.uk](mailto:hello@metropolis.co.uk)

## HOW TO SUBMIT

*Fortean Times* reserves all rights to reuse material submitted by FT readers and contributors in any medium or format.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Contact the art director by email ([etienne@forteanimes.com](mailto:etienne@forteanimes.com)) before sending samples of work. We cannot guarantee to respond to unsolicited work, though every effort will be made to do so.

## ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS

Please send all submissions or ideas for articles to David Sutton, Editor, *Fortean Times* by email: [dsutton@forteanimes.com](mailto:dsutton@forteanimes.com). As we receive a large volume of submissions, a decision may not be immediate.

## LETTERS

Letters of comment or about experiences are welcome. Send to PO Box 1200, Whitstable, CT1 9RH, UK or email [sieveking@forteanimes.com](mailto:sieveking@forteanimes.com). We reserve the right to edit submissions.

## BOOKS, PERIODICALS AND REVIEW MATERIAL

Contact the reviews editor at: [dvbarrett@forteanimes.com](mailto:dvbarrett@forteanimes.com)

## CAVEAT

*FT* aims to present the widest range of interpretations to stimulate discussion and welcomes helpful criticism. The opinions of contributors are not necessarily those of the editors. *FT* can take no responsibility for submissions, but will take all reasonable care of material in its possession. Requests for return of material should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope or an International Reply Coupon.

*We occasionally use material that has been placed in the public domain. It is not always possible to identify the copyright holder. If you claim credit for something we've published, we'll be pleased to make acknowledgement.*

## CLIPSTERS WANTED

Regular clipsters have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: **1 AUG 2023**. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

Mail to: **Fortean Times, PO BOX 1200, WHITSTABLE, CT1 9RH**

E-mail: [news@forteanimes.com](mailto:news@forteanimes.com)

# WHY FORTEAN?



**FORTEAN TIMES** is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is

in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS

**AUSTRALIA** Graham Cordon (SA), Tony Healy (ACT), John Palazzi (NSW), Len Watson (Qld). **CANADA** Brian Chapman (BC), Graham Conway (BC).

**CYBERSPACE** John F Callahan, Hugh Henry, Steve Scanlon, Janet Wilson.

**ENGLAND** Gail-Nina Anderson, Louise Bath, James Beckett, Claire Blamey, Peter Christie, Mat Coward, Kate Eccles, Paul Farthing, George Featherston, Paul Gallagher, Alan Gardiner, Keith George, Anne Hardwick, Richard Lowke, Diana Lyons, Dave Malin, Nick Maloret, Tom Ruffles, Meryl Santis, Paul Screeton, Gary Stocker, Roman Suchyj, Frank Thomas, Paul Thomas, Owen Whiteoak, Bobby Zodiac. **FRANCE** Michel Meurger. **GERMANY** Ulrich Magin. **IRELAND** Andy Conlon, Pat Corcoran. **ISRAEL** Zvi Ron. **NEW ZEALAND** Peter Hassall.

**SCOTLAND** Roger Musson. **SWEDEN** Sven Rosén. **THAILAND** Terry W Colvin.

**USA** Loren Coleman (ME), Jim Conlan (CT), Myron Hoyt (ME), Greg May (FL), Jim Riecken (NY), Joseph Trainor (MA), Jeffrey Vallance (CA).

## FORT SORTERS

Regular Fort Sorts are currently on hiatus – but please continue to send in your clippings to *Fortean Times*, PO Box 1200, Whitstable, CT1 9RH.

## CLIPPING CREDITS FOR FT435

Daina Almario-Kopp, Gerard Apps, David Barrett, Louise Bath, James Beckett, Tim Bintrim, Peter Christie, Andy Conlon, Pat Corcoran, Andy Duncan, John Evans, Alan Gardiner, Keith George, Richard George, Jennifer Green, Anne Hardwick, Hugh Henry, Nigel Herwin, Sharon Hill, Tony James, Jax, Rosalind Johnson, Robin Lee, Dave Malin, Nick Maloret, Richard Muirhead, Tom Ruffles, Gil Sprow, Gary Stocker, Brett Taylor, Meryl Santis, Paul Screeton, Clive Watson, Paul Whyte, Len Watson, Owen Whiteoak, Mark Williams, James Wright, Sharon Zwolinkiewicz.



# PHENOMENOMIX

THE DEVIL'S LEAP

HUNT EMERSON

ONCE, THE DEVIL DECIDED TO GO FISHING...

I DON'T KNOW THE FIRST THING ABOUT FISHING, BUT IT CAN'T BE THAT DIFFICULT! I'LL NEED SOME NETS-AND I KNOW WHERE I CAN FIND THEM! HA-HA-HA-HA!!!



THAT NIGHT, AT NEWLYN, IN CORNWALL, NAUGHTY OLD NICK STEALS THE DRYING NETS FROM THE BEACH! HA-HA-HA-HA!!!

HA-HA-HA-HA!!!



BUT HE IS OBSERVED, AND THE LOCAL FISHERS GAVE CHASE, SINGING LUSTY CHURCH MUSIC...



THIS MAKES THE DEVIL VERY UNCOMFORTABLE!



IN HIS RUSH TO ESCAPE HE LEAPED ACROSS THE RIVER AND NEWLYN CHURCH, LANDING ON THE GRANITE ROCKS AT TOLCARNE!



HIS FOOT SANK INTO THE GRANITE, AND THE NETS FELL SO HARD THEY LEFT MARKS ON THE ROCK!



THE CHOIR OF FISHERMEN CAME ON, ROARING A MEDLEY OF MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS!

ALLELUJAH!!



THE DEVIL TURNED AT BAY!!!



BUCCA-BUCCA-BUCCA!!!



...WHICH MEANS-

"YOU ARE DOOMED TO BE DESTROYED BY A FOREIGN POWER!"



NO IT DOESN'T! "BUCCA" IS AN OLD CORNISH WORD FOR "PIXIE" OR "POOKAH!!"

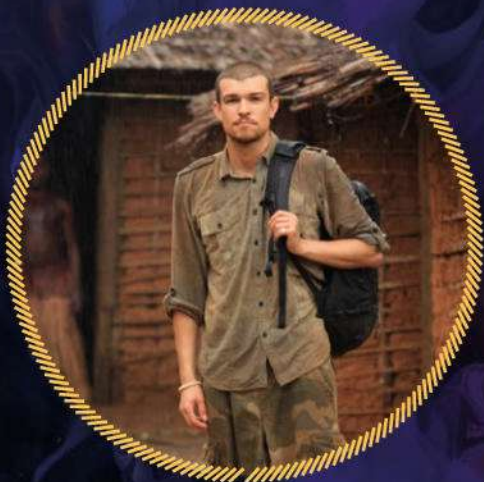
WELL, IT CAME TRUE! IN 1595 200 INVADING SPANISH SAILORS BURNED THE CHURCH AT NEWLYN, AND TWO OTHERS! SO THERE!



Story mangled from CLOVEN COUNTRY by Jeremy Harte. Great book!



COMING  
NEXT MONTH



## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF FORT

THE CRYPTOZOOLOGICAL  
ADVENTURES OF PAT SPAIN



## REVENGE OF THE SHAMAN

THE STRANGE AFFAIR OF THE  
TWO-HEADED AMULET

+

UFOLOGICAL EGOS,  
COMMANDO LAVA,  
LUCID DREAMING  
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 436  
ON SALE 7 SEPT 2023

# STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

In Sambhal, a city in Uttar Pradesh in northern India, eight people working in a storage facility were killed by a deluge of potatoes. Large quantities had been stored in bags on the building's roof, which gave way under the weight, resulting in those inside being crushed by tons of falling vegetables. *BBC News, 17 Mar 2023.*

After no one had contact with Aleasha Sullivan, 32, of Holcombe, Devon, after 12 October last year, her support worker reported her missing to the police on 21 October. Visiting her flat, officers got no response, but on looking through her letterbox, could see a body lying against a door. Breaking in, they found that Alesha had been dead for several days, but also discovered the body of her boyfriend, Joshua Sandercock, 30, upstairs in the living room, and immediately declared a major incident, treating it as a potential crime scene. They could not, however, find any sign of a break-in or any other third-party presence in the flat over the previous few days, and postmortem examination of the bodies showed that both had died of natural causes, Sullivan of a pulmonary embolism caused by a clot on the lungs, and Sandercock of pneumonia. The coroner said: "It can be said very clearly there is no evidence of the suggestion the deaths were connected in any way other than entirely coincidentally." *dailypost.co.uk, 22 Apr 2023.*

A couple in the Czech Republic called emergency services after being unable to get an answer from their 30-year-old son's room, "despite them knocking for a long time". Firefighters kicked the door of his bedroom down and found the man dead on the floor. He was dressed in a one-piece women's swimming costume and had wrapped his legs and torso tightly in strips of plastic and fabric. Beside him, on the floor, was a hand-held electric massager, still connected to the mains. His body showed burn marks six inches above his penis that were the same shape as the massager's head. It was found that the device, which showed signs of wear, had malfunctioned, so the coroner ruled that his death was the result of "accidental electrocution during auto-erotic manipulation". At autopsy, however, the man's corpse was also found to have a "strange foreign body" measuring about 5.5cm (2in) in



his intestine. This turned out to be "a fancy condom in a plastic translucent box, onto which a label was fixed with the victim's first name marked with a black inscription", according to doctors from University Hospital Hradec Králové, who published details of the man's death in the journal *Legal Medicine*. There was also a 9cm (3.5in) object lodged in his rectum, which was found to be a "round, plastic cylinder, onto which a ping-pong ball, fixed with a plastic wrap, was placed". The journal published a helpful diagram showing the position of all these elements and reported that as well as electrocution, his behaviour had caused "internal organ congestion and swelling in the lungs and brain due to trapped fluid". *dailymail.co.uk, 11 Mar 2023.*

Following a series of arguments, Andrew Hague, 31, confronted Simon Wilkinson, 50, outside his flat on Fox Hill Road, Sheffield. Having told Wilkinson to "come out here and fight like a man", Hague attacked him with a bag containing "four or five tins of Pokémon cards" which witnesses reported seeing him swing "like a cricketer", battering Wilkinson about the head "numerous times" and knocking him senseless to the floor. Hague followed up this attack by punching and stamping on his victim, leaving him "bloodied and lifeless". He was later sentenced to 17 years in jail for Wilkinson's murder and admitted to Rampton high-security psychiatric hospital. *BBC News, 9 May 2023.*

The Japanese island of Hokkaido is suffering an increasing bear problem. It is home to the legendary "Ninja Bear" that has been massacring cattle (**FT426:7**), and in 2021 flights from its airport were disrupted after a bear ran amok there. Authorities were alerted to another possible incident when a boat operator saw a bear near Lake Shumarinai carrying a pair of rubber fishing waders in its mouth. After searching the area, they found a human head on the lakeshore, which they identified as belonging to Toshihiro Nishikawa, 54, who had gone fishing at the lake on his own; they later tracked and killed a bear that was believed to have eaten him. Dangerous encounters with bears are increasing on the island as their population booms following an explosion in the deer population and a ban on bear hunting. *cbsnews.com, 18 May 2023.*

# RECORD COLLECTOR PRESENTS METALLICA

**JOE BERLINGER**  
HOW SOME KIND OF  
MONSTER SAVED HIM  
— AND THE BAND

**EXCLUSIVE**  
CLIFF BURTON'S  
LAST UK  
INTERVIEW

**M72 LIVE SH\*T!**  
SIMONE FROM  
EPICA REPORTS!

## MEN FOR ALL SEASONS

THE COLLECTORS! THE ALBUMS REAPPRAISED!  
PLUS: SELECT UK DISCOGRAPHY

LANG LANG: "I FELT FLAMES AND THOUGHT, 'OH MY GOD!'" EYE WITNESS: SAN FRAN 1982  
FLEMMING RASMUSSEN: PUPPETS, POKER AND BREAKFAST BUFFETS THE STORY BEHIND  
THE BLACK ALBUM ART BRIAN SLAGEL SWINGS THE BLADE THE ROCK & ROLL HALL OF FAME  
METALLICA BOOK AND MOVIE CLUBS + INSIDE THE ALL WITHIN MY HANDS FOUNDATION

£8.95



OUT NOW!

THE ALBUMS, THE HISTORY AND THE MILESTONES OF THE BIGGEST  
METAL BAND ON EARTH... AND NOTHING ELSE MATTERS.

on sale now, or available to order from here:  
[shop.recordcollectormag.com/rcmetallicaf](http://shop.recordcollectormag.com/rcmetallicaf)




**\$6.66**  
PER ISSUE



A  
**MONSTER**  
APP

THE **WORLD'S #1 HORROR** MAGAZINE  
IS NOW AVAILABLE PRIOR TO NEWSSTANDS ON **iPHONE** AND **ANDROID**.

VISIT [RUE-MORGUE.COM](http://RUE-MORGUE.COM) ON THE  APP STORE

FOLLOW US ON **INSTAGRAM**, **TWITTER** AND **FACEBOOK** 